

Saints of God

Ellet J. Waggoner

The Signs of the Times : February 11, 1889

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, . . . to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints; grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Romans 1:7

The first seven verses of the book of Romans constitute the introduction to the epistle—the salutation; but those who have read the preceding articles of this series will conclude, if they never thought of it before, that there is a world of thought conveyed even in one of the greetings of the apostle Paul. Not one word did he write in vain. The expression to which we wish to call especial attention in this article is, “called to be saints,” or, more properly, “called saints.”

The word “saints,” is used throughout the Bible to denote the people of God, both while they are in this world, and after they have been redeemed. On his missionary journeys, Paul gathered money for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Romans 15:25, 26; 1 Corinthians 16:1. Three other epistles he addressed respectively as follows: “To The saints which are at Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1); “to all the saints in Christ which are at Philippi” (Philippians 1:1); and “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” Colossians 1:2. In short, it is generally used as synonymous with “Christian.” This should serve to give us an exalted idea of what it is to be a Christian, rather than an inferior idea of what it is to be a saint.

The Roman Catholic Church, with the arrogance characteristic of it, has assumed the prerogative of making saints. It holds that a saint is far different from the ordinary Christian, and confers the title of “saint” upon men long dead, much as a college will grant a post-graduate degree to one who since graduation has been particularly successful in certain lines of work or study. But this is wholly a perversion of the Bible use of the term, for it properly belongs to all who are in Christ.

A saint is one who is sanctified. The two words have a common derivation. Paul addressed his first epistle to the Corinthians, “unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” 1 Corinthians 1:2. Sanctification is not, as some imagine, a special grace bestowed upon certain Christians, but is the condition of all who are truly Christians. All who are in Christ Jesus are sanctified, and for this reason they are called saints. The modern idea that a man may live for years in a justified state before God, and still know nothing of sanctification, is but another phase of the Roman Catholic idea that a saint is an extraordinary Christian—something more than a Christian. To be sanctified is looked upon, not as a necessity, but as a privilege granted to a few; and the result is a lowering of the standard of simple Christianity.

The word rendered “sanctified,” means to consecrate, to devote to religious uses. The word rendered “saint,” signifies the person or thing being devoted or set apart. I will quote the first definitions both of the Greek and the Latin words that are so rendered: “*Agios (hagios)* “devoted to the gods, (Latin, Sacer); and so I, in good sense, Sacred, holy.” Liddell and Scott. The Latin word *sanctus*, which is rendered “saint,” is from the verb *sancio*, which is defined, “to render sacred or inviolable by a religious act; to appoint as sacred or inviolable¹.” As used of legal ordinances, or other public proceedings, it meant, “to establish, appoint, decree, and ordain; also to make irrevocable or unalterable.” Harper’s Latin Dictionary. These definitions will materially aid the reader in his understanding of sanctification, a subject, which we can at this, time scarcely more than hint at. In harmony with these definitions is the following comment by Dr. Barnes on the word “saints”: —

“The radical idea of the word is, that which is separated from a common to a sacred use, and answers to the Hebrew word *Kadosh*. It is applied to anything that is set apart to the service of God, to the temple, to the garments, etc., of the priests, and to the priests themselves. It was applied to the Jews as a people separated from other nations, and devoted or consecrated to God, while other nations were devoted to the service of idols. It is also applied to Christians, as being a people devoted or set apart to the service of God. The radical idea, then, as applied to Christians, is that they are separated from other men, and other objects and pursuits, and consecrated to the service of God. This is the peculiar characteristic of the saints.”

To be a saint of God is to be sanctified or consecrated to his service. The process is this: God calls all men. “The Spirit and the bride say, . . . Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Revelation 22:17. This call is extended to all men indiscriminately. The Spirit strives with every soul. At the door of every heart Christ stands and knocks. Some hear his voice, and open to him. This is an invitation for him to take complete possession. It is a surrender of self to God; a yielding to him to be his bondservant. This surrender of self to God, that his will may be the rule in every act, word, and thought, is the act of consecration to God. It must be a voluntary act on the part of the individual, yet it is the love of Christ which constrains to the act. The individual, having counted the cost, has deliberately given up the world with its sinful pleasures, has renounced all purpose and desire to have his own way, and has accepted Christ as his sole Master. He is then devoted to the service of God, and is therefore sanctified, a saint of God.

From this it appears that sanctification does not necessarily imply perfection of character, in the sense that the expression is commonly used. The individual at first has no Christian character. The character is not changed in a moment from imperfection to perfection; but the yielding of one’s self to Christ, for him to work in the soul that which is good, may be the work of a moment. Old things are now passed away, and a new life begins. Although he does not attain at a single bound to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, he is not condemned, because all his acts are wrought in God. He is not sanctified because he is holy, but he is sanctified because he has put himself into

the hands of God to be made holy.

Perhaps the following criticism by Olshausen, upon the word rendered “saints,” may make the matter more clear: —

“The word in its immediate signification denotes no degree of moral perfection (the Corinthians, who were in so many respects deserving of blame, are called *hagioi*, saints), but refers to the separation of believers from the great mass of the cosmos, the Gentile world. Yet it doubtless also implies that Christians have been made partakers of the principle of a higher moral life, which, as in a course of development, is gradually to pervade the whole man, and produce perfect holiness. Now this principle is the Spirit of Christ, so that Paul’s idea ‘made us accepted in the beloved,’ is also applied to the conception of *hagios*. Christians are holy on account of Christ who lives in them, and who is their true life.”

Says the apostle Paul: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:1-3. The phrase, “the higher Christian life,” as applied to a condition higher than that of simple acceptance with God, is false and misleading. The Christian life is the highest life there is. It is a life in Christ, who sits at the right hand of God in Heaven. Less than this is not a Christian life.

The object of this article is not to lower anybody’s conception of sanctification, or saintship, but to elevate the conception of what it is to be a Christian; to impress upon the mind the fact that one who is not sanctified in Christ Jesus, and thus a saint of God, is not a Christian. Neither is it designed to discourage anybody. It would be false and cruel sympathy that would seek to encourage one by representing the Christian life as a low plane of living. The true way is to set forth the Christian life in its true light, and then point out the source of help.

The Christian life is continual progression. The Christian is a disciple, a learner; he is one who is engaged in warfare, continually gaining victories; he is one running a race, ever drawing nearer the goal, which is “the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” His Master in the school is Christ, whose yoke he has taken, and from whom he learns; his leader in the battle is Jesus Christ, who, as Captain of the Lord’s host, has all power in Heaven and earth to impart to his faithful followers, so that they may be more than conquerors through Him who loves them; and in the race that is set before them, they are to run with perseverance, “looking unto Jesus.” And so, “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

¹ Secure from destruction, violence, or desecration. Incapable of being broken or dishonored.