



Behind Enemy Lines Training Saints

Written by an Inmate

Who Are the Saints?

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Let's start with a quick survey. Who in here is a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ – that He is the Son of God who came down from Heaven to die for our sins, rose from the grave and is back up in Heaven seated at the right hand of the Father? Let's see some hands ... okay. So now, who in here would consider themselves a saint? ... okay. Well, it's good to be humble. But who in here is a saint? Who in here does God consider a saint? ... Well, now we have a little problem – everyone who raised their hands to the first question should have raised it to that last one.

I know, I know, your gut reaction is to disagree with me (especially any Catholics in the room). You know the life you lead or have led and see the sin, the failures, the pain. Saints are supposed to be above all that, right?

Here is where the confusion arises. You see, the Roman Catholic Church has a very particular definition of a saint. And because they use it so much and so publicly, their definition has taken over from how it is originally used in the Bible. For them, it's a title – like a rank to be earned and to be assigned only by them to a select few they deem worthy of the term. By their definition, a saint is someone with “heroic virtue,” is in heaven (so there would be no living saints), who has allowed Christ to live in and through them, and who has performed at least one verified miracle. And that's all well and good to honor those fierce faith warriors who have left their mark on the world by the good works God did through them, but God in His holy Word calls all believers saints.

In the New Testament, the word translated as “saints” is “hagios” (ἅγιος), which means someone consecrated, dedicated, set apart (or “holy”) to God. It's used over 60 times for believers, and it was a favorite term of Paul's in his letters where he used it 39 times! More than any other term he used for believers. In his epistles, you'll often see him open the letter “to the saints” or send greetings “from the saints” in whatever city he's writing from or to. He writes to the saints in Rome, in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Colossae, and even in Corinth, which was the “sin city” of the time, since it was a major port and melting pot of cultures – all with their various pagan gods, sacrifices, and even temple prostitutes.

A saint, as the Bible uses the term, isn't someone extraordinary who goes around performing miracles and never sinning. A saint is any and all ordinary people who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is through that belief – that faith – that God declares us holy. He imputes on us / credits us with His own righteousness, and that's why we can be called saints. As Isaiah puts it, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, so He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” ... (Isaiah 61:10). It isn't anything that we've done to deserve the term. It's what he's done for us.

As they say, “every saint has a past; every sinner can have a future.” Our past isn't what defines us. And that's the good news of the gospel: that even though we're undeserving and have done awful things, we are declared holy, declared and called to be saints in His kingdom and given eternal life with God as a free gift – but one so precious and costly that He had to pay the price Himself, with His blood, a price we could never hope to pay on our own. For “all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags” Isaiah 64:6) in His eyes due to the corruption of sin.

So anyway, why does it matter that we're called saints in the Bible? How you see yourself will affect how you see God, your relationship with Him, with others, and your circumstances in life whether good or bad. We live from the inside-out; who we are inside dictates how we act outside.

And it matters because sometimes labels do matter – especially when they’re assigned to us by the Lord God Almighty. The label (*holds up prison ID card*) that says “Felon” isn’t who I am or who you are. It’s a label assigned by an inferior, human authority of the state of North Carolina. It will one day pass away. And I know my ID card in heaven (if there is such a thing) will read “Saint,” “Son,” “heir,” “beloved child,” “brother,” “citizen of Heaven,” and “friend.” These are things God calls us in His Word – the highest authority that will never pass away. Even if I don’t always see myself that way – He does. And we need to remember that and keep it in our hearts and the forefront of our minds. Because when we do that, we remember our calling – who we really are.

Our old self, our old life has passed away. We are new creations in Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). When we are given a new life, a new identity, can we then just keep acting the way we did in our old life with its old labels like offender, felon, murderer, rapist, drug dealer, user, addict, thief? No! That’s not who we are anymore (see **1 Corinthians 6:11**)! We have new life and a new identity, and we have to reflect outwardly in our actions this new inner reality!

When you start to see yourself the way God sees you – as his beloved child and a saint in His Kingdom – look at what you’re doing and ask yourself: is this something a saint would do? Am I about to disgrace the new name and identity God has given me? You – as a Christian – are a saint ... so act like it!!

We’re not doing it all on our own. The Holy Spirit now dwells within us and helps us in weakness and conforms us into His image. It’s a process called sanctification (which is from the same root word in Greek for saint but in verb form), and it doesn’t happen instantly – it takes time and we can either resist the process or go along with the Spirit’s promptings.

Paul in the book of **Colossians** (go ahead and turn to **Chapter 3**) warns the saints about living the way you used to live and exhorts us to live a life that reflects our new identity and life in Christ. Starting at **Verse 5**:

Colossians 3:5-17:

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:¹ sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

And finally, a word from Peter ...

1 Peter 1:14-16

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

That’s a lot of holies in there, which is actually the same Greek word again that is used for saints, “hagios”. So be holy for He is holy. Be a saint as you are called to be.

AMEN.