



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ryan Ferguson

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Kevin Wise

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Christians Are Saints

By Clinton D. Hamilton

The word “saints” in the New Testament is not applied to a special group of persons of exceptional holiness. On the contrary, it is applied to every person who is a follower of the Lord. Paul uses the word to refer to every disciple in the following passage, **“when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed”** (2 Thess. 1:10).

Saint-Set Apart

The term “saint” can be studied with profit. The Greek term from which it is translated literally means separated. Among the Greeks it meant devoted or dedicated to the gods (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 2. 226). So far as the New Testament use of the word is concerned, it means to be dedicated or consecrated to God and thus separated from sin. When it is used with reference to men, the significance is that they are consecrated or devoted to God. The whole point is that men no longer walk after the desires of sin but have put their affections on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Those thus set apart to the service of God are saints. Various usages of the term in the New Testament show this to be the case.

Peter came to all the saints (members of the church) who dwelt at Lydda (Acts 9:32). Paul tells the brethren at Rome that they were called for the purpose of being saints (set apart to the service of God). His epistle was written **“to all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints”** (Rom. 1:7). Paul also said that he was going to Jerusalem to minister to the poor among the saints there as the brethren in Macedonia and Achaia had made a contribution for **“the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem”** (Rom. 15:25-26). Paul’s salutation to the saints in Romans 16:15 shows that he referred to the Christians as a group and not to some specially canonized group.

The Ephesian letter was written to the **“saints which are at Ephesus.”** This certainly was written to the entire church in the city of Ephesus. To conclude that a

saint is a specially endowed and canonized person is contrary to the whole tenor of the Scriptures and a violation of those here cited.

To prove further that the saints are the church, I call attention to Paul's use of the terms in Philippians. The first verse of the letter states that he is writing to the saints in Christ Jesus. Later he calls these same people the *church*. **"And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only"** (Phil. 4:15). He addressed the letter to the saints but called these same people the church. The only conclusion which the statements warrant is that saints and Christians are synonymous. There was not one group known as saints in contradiction to another group of ordinary "lay people." Numerous other passages could be cited to show the same truth that has been demonstrated above. All of God's children are a set apart people dedicated to His service. This is the meaning of the term "saint."

Demands of Sainthood

In our relationship to God, we are consecrated to His service. Thus, the very definition of the term enables us to understand some of the obligations of saints to God. God saved us **"and called us with a holy calling . . . according to his own purpose and grace"** (2 Thess. 1:9). Therefore, the believer is to sanctify himself

in harmony with God's purpose in calling him. Accordingly, Peter tells us, **"like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy"** (1 Pet. 1:15-16). When one considers the prediction of the dissolution of the present world and the judgment of God, he is exhorted to live holy and godly (2 Pet. 3:11).

Because Christians are thus to be saints (set apart to holy living), they are spoken of as a **"holy temple"** unto God (1 Cor. 3:17). This reference is clearly to a local church. But in Ephesians 2:21, the reference is to the entire church. The apostle says that in Christ we are fitly framed together and grow **"into a holy temple in the Lord"** and are consequently for **"a habitation of God in the Spirit"** (Eph. 2:21-22). The same group is further described as a **"holy priesthood"** and a **"holy nation"** (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Our obligation to God is to be holy—separated from sin and devoted to righteousness. Because of this separation and devotion, we are saints. If our lives are devoid of this, we are not conducting ourselves consistently with our calling. We have frustrated the purpose of God in our lives and have failed in the obligations of sainthood.

Saints the Bible Knows Nothing About

A special body of canonized persons known as saints is unknown to the Scriptures. The foregoing part of this article sufficiently has dealt with this truth. However, more needs to be said about the Catholic position on the idea of a special group who are a model of sanctity and accordingly are known as saints. The Catholic Church, according to some of her theologians, purports to be infallible in the solemn canonization of saints. The reason assigned for believing the Catholic Church to be infallible in this action is that those who are upheld as models of sanctification should be nothing other than the church declares them to be. In previous issues of this magazine the question of infallibility has been dealt with and there is no need at this time to discuss this issue. However, it is needful that we examine Catholic definitions and usages.

The word "saint" to a Catholic means one who has reached the end for which they were called in the kingdom of the Lord (*The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, edited by Canon George Smith, The Macmillan Company: New York, 1950, 2.685). Accordingly, the practice of the Catholic Church is not to declare a person a saint officially until he or she is supposedly in enjoyment of the heavenly home. They are just and have certain merit and supernatural excellence. For this reason, they are canonized and all held up as models of righteousness while at the same time they are in communion with the Catholic Church on earth. Through this communion of saints, it is believed that the faithful are helped while still on earth. No such doctrine, practice, or belief was known in New Testament times for the Scriptures refer to no such things.

Veneration and Worship

Catholics try to make a distinction between what they do with reference to the group known as saints and that which they do with reference to God.

The former they call veneration; the latter they call adoration. The Latin term *dulia* is used for veneration and *latria* is used for worship paid to God. Another term is used to describe devotion paid to Mary; it is *hyperdulia*. This means that a special veneration is given to Mary because of what Catholics call a “unique supernatural excellence.” To what authority does the Catholic Church appeal for such teaching and practice? As one might expect, the appeal is to uninspired men: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the second Council of Nicaea. The fact that no reference is ordinarily made by Catholics to plain passages of Scripture depicts their plight: there is no such passage! The distinction made between veneration and worship is certainly a fine line, if indeed there is a line at all! The idea in both terms is that one reveres and honors another. The only distinction that Catholics could make is that there are three levels of worship with God at the top, then Mary and finally saints. The New Testament reveals that Christians worship God only; there is not another level of beings to worship or thus honor. We are to imitate the righteous conduct in others, but imitation is a far cry from worship or veneration in the sense of giving special devotion in prayer or similar acts. See the following passages for the idea of imitating a person’s good conduct: 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17. However, the idea of any special act of devotion such as a prayer to such persons is unknown to the New Testament practice. There is not one example of such nor is there any command for such. To Bible loving and Bible obeying people, veneration of a special group is sin.

Intercession of Saints

There is no case in the Bible of a dead person praying for one alive. There is no statement from which a justifiable conclusion could be drawn to this end. Frequent reference is made about living persons praying for those still alive. Requests are often made by Paul to the end that saints on earth might pray for him; he assures them that he will remember them in his prayers. But to say that any reference is made to a member of the church praying to a deceased saint or a deceased saint praying for one on earth is to impute something to the Bible which it does not teach. Catholics are wont to say that through the saints and their merit our petitions are effective. They tell us that God can know our petitions apart from the saints, but our petitions can be more effective through the saints.

We need not the intercession of the saints before the throne of God as we have one who makes intercession for us. **“My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”** (1 John 2:1). God will hear our prayer and grant our peti-

tion on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ apart from a group known as saints. Christ is not one who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but rather is one who has been tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. 4:15). Thus, it is with confidence that we can come to the throne of God—on the basis of Christ’s goodness and not on the goodness of men.

Relics and Images

Thomas Aquinas says that the ground on which images and relics are honored is that honor should be shown to saints as members of the body of Christ, children and friends of God, and intercessors for men. In memory of them Catholics are thus told to honor their bodies as they were temples of the Holy Spirit and are destined to be transformed into the glory of the resurrection. Another basis for veneration of images is that the images call to mind the saints. Thus, it is said that the reverence paid them is relative because the thing really revered is the saint and not his body. The honor paid the image or relic is said to pass to the rational persons whom the images represent to the mind. The person who honors the image is supposedly honoring the person. Theoretically, this is what the Catholic Church teaches; in practice, many times this is not the case. All that has been said with reference to veneration of a saint will equally apply to the honoring of a saint’s image or relic. Further, is it not absurd to say that the veneration concerns the person and not the image while



we ourselves **“are also”** men with you (Acts 10:26; 14:15). This is enough to keep any true child of God from veneration of a “saint,” an image, or a relic.

Saints and Indulgences

The idea that indulgence can be granted is based on the notion that the saints had a superabundance of good works which merits become the property of the whole church to be administered under its jurisdiction. It is affirmed that the common property of an organization is administered according to

the will of him who is the head of such. This is the argument that Thomas Aquinas makes in his *Summa Theologia*.

at the same time to state that images and relics should be honored?

The second Council of Nicaea in dealing with this question affirmed that such veneration should not be with *latria* which is due only to God. This seems to me to be a virtual admission that what is paid to images and relics borders closely on worship as to God, if not that very thing. The Bible position is not to honor any image or relic. If such has always been the practice of God’s people, why is it that nothing like that is recorded in the New Testament? If veneration of images and relics be a part of the will of God, why did not early Christians venerate the image or relic of Peter and the other apostles? It is rather strange that such conduct is not even hinted at in the Bible. The apostles while living emphasized the fact that no special veneration or honor should be given them. They said

In the first place, an indulgence is unscriptural. Purgatory, another false doctrine, is closely connected with indulgences as indulgences concern persons in purgatory. Closely associated with these beliefs is the doctrine of meritorious works. Salvation is a matter of grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). Whatever a person does by faith is the work of God because it is commanded by Him. The work itself is not meritorious but the Savior in whose name and by whose authority such is done has merit before the throne of God to save me. Accordingly, there is not any excess of good works in any person’s life. Good works merit no one’s salvation. But to walk by faith demands one’s doing what God commands. When thus walking a person is saved by the merits of Christ and His sacrifice in whom is one’s faith.

With the idea of good works being meritorious before God refuted, the belief in indulgences granted from the superabundance of good works in the lives of “saints” is simultaneously destroyed.

Yes, Christians are saints. The Catholic definition of the term is unscriptural and the doctrines the Catholic Church has developed over a period of years ignore basic truths of the New Testament as we have observed in the above examination of Catholic teaching.

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