

Word Study **Saint**

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Hagios (saint). . . IT IS CHARACTERISTICALLY GODLIKENESS

A lot of people think that sainthood is limited to a few deceased individuals. They could not be more wrong. All Christians are saints. We read: **"To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints..."** (Romans 1:7a); **"Paul ...unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints..."** (1 Corinthians 1: 1,2a); **"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus..."** (Ephesians 1:1a); **"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..."** (Philippians 1:1); **"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae..."** (Colossians 1:1,2a). The people of God, under the Old Covenant, were also described as "saints". There are nineteen such references in the Psalms alone.

The main Hebrew word for "saint" is *chasid*, which means kind or pious. This is interesting because hasidism is a Jewish pietistic movement, which still persists today in small but vigorous groups. The supporters of Judas Maccabeus (2nd century BC) were known as Hasideans. They urged ritual observance and faith and were the precursors of the Pharisees. However, the point is this: God's people were called "saints" long before the Hasideans.

BEING DIFFERENT

The Greek word is *hagios*, which is also the word for "holy." W.E. Vine has written: 'In the plural, as used of believers, it designates all such and is not applied merely to persons of exceptional holiness, or to those who, having died, were characterised by exceptional acts of saintliness.' But what does it mean to be a saint or to be holy? It means simply that one is *different*; and the difference lies in the fact that one is *in Christ*. "He never forgets the presence of Christ; he walks for ever with Christ; he makes no decision without consulting the guidance of Christ; he attempts no task without the help of Christ; he is in Christ just as really as he is in the air he breathes." (Barclay). You see, the Sabbath was holy because it was different from all other days; the priest was holy because he was set apart or was different from all other men; the temple was holy because it was different from all other buildings; the Bible is holy because it is different from all other books; and the Christian is holy because he too is different – he marches to the sound of another trumpet and is God's man.

Sainthood and holiness, therefore, go hand in hand. God has always sought holiness in his people. **"Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be you holy: for I am the Lord your God."** (Leviticus 20:7). **"But as He who has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conduct; because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy."** (1 Peter 1:15,16). G.B. Stevens in Hastings' Bible Dictionary wrote: 'It is evident that *hagios* and its kindred words...express something more and higher than *hieros*, sacred, outwardly associated with God; something more than *semnos*, worthy, honourable; something more than *hagnos*, pure, free from defilement. *Hagios* is...more comprehensive...It is characteristically godlikeness.' Every saint should be striving every day and in every way

to be more like his God. The wonderful thing is that He has been given the perfect example to follow- Jesus Himself.

SAINTS CAN CHANGE THINGS

God sees two kinds of people in this world – saints and sinners. A sinner is separated from God because of his sin. A saint is united with God because of His Son. A saint is simply a sinner saved by grace. All sinners can become saints through obedience to the gospel of Christ. Once I was a sinner, but now I am a saint. Once I was in the kingdom of darkness; now I am in the kingdom of light. Once I rejoiced in the works of the flesh; now I glory in the fruit of the Spirit. Once I was in the broad way that leads to destruction; now I am in the narrow way that leads to life. Once I was dead in trespasses and sins; now I am alive and in the Master for evermore. I have been justified, sanctified and saved. Thank God for Jesus!

One thing a saint should never do is to turn his back on this world and enter a monastery or a convent or a similar institution. Jesus never encouraged such action in His followers. The saint has to be in the world, but not of it. He or she has to work in the world to make a difference. And we can all make a difference if we remain faithful to the Master and follow in His footsteps. We once wrote these words in one of the tracts published in Motherwell:

'One of our great tragedies today in Britain, it seems to us, is that people have lost heart. They have given up trying. It isn't that they no longer believe, but they have become convinced that it will not make any difference. There is nothing they can do! We believe there is and we think it is invaluable. We can change the world we live in. The members of the Church of Christ are dedicated to doing just that. None of them are wealthy, powerful or influential in halls of government. But they believe that through prayer and with the Spirit of God they can alter the world.'

The Roman Catholic Church venerates its saints. A saint is established by canonisation, following beatification. The first saint canonised by a Pope was Ulrich, bishop of Augsburg, who died in 973 and was canonised by Pope John XV at the Lateran Council of 993. There have been a great many canonisations since. Today, two authentic miracles obtained through invocation after beatification must occur before the cause of canonisation can be introduced. Of course, there is nothing in the Bible about all this. There is also nothing in the Bible about praying to the saints. There is a lot in the Bible about the prayers of the saints. I like this passage from the book of Revelation: **"And when He had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials of odours, which are the prayers of the saints."** (5:8). So, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, our prayers reach heaven and are scooped up in bowls by the angels to be presented to the Lamb (Jesus) as incense. 'The allusion is clearly to the temple service, and to the fact that incense was offered by the priest in the temple itself at the time that prayer was offered by the people in the courts of the temple.' (Barnes).

We must see sainthood as God sees sainthood. The world looks upon a saint as someone in a stained-glass window. God looks upon a saint as one who has seized the window of opportunity to be saved through His beloved Son. He or she is also a believer, a Christian, a disciple, a child of God, a brother or sister in Christ, a sheep of the fold of God, the salt of the earth, the ransomed of the Lord, a vessel of honour, a vessel of mercy, etc. May all saints live worthy of all these titles.