

"AS BECOMETH SAINTS"

"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints." Ephesians 5:3.

Every reader of God's Word knows that the word "saint" is used frequently in both Old and New Testaments, especially in the latter. In the New Testament the word "saint" is not used exclusively of those who have attained a state of exceptional holiness. It is not reserved for those in the glory now, who were characterized by extraordinary saintliness during their earthly sojourn. "Saint" is used sixty-two times in the New Testament to designate the believer in Christ Jesus. "Saint" is the equivalent of "Christian," no matter how low the state of spirituality may be. The term never indicates personal character or worthiness. Christian sainthood is not the result of personal achievement. It is a new spiritual standing into which God, in His wonderful grace, brings men and women, by the ministry of His Holy Spirit, when they repent of sin and trust in His Beloved Son.

Dr. W. Graham Scroggie well said, "The Bible uses the word not as a mark of attainment, but as an evidence of obtainment, not with reference to the believer's state, but to his standing, not of what we are in this world, but of what we are in Christ. Sainthood is not a prospect at the end of the Christian career, but a bestowal at the beginning of it."

A saint is nothing more nor less than a believer in Christ. "Saint" is a term used of all Christians whether they are dead or alive, rich or poor, pious or impious, spiritual or carnal. It may seem strange to some to find this to be the case; nevertheless, it is true. Sometimes a professed Christian and active church member will say, "I am no saint." What does he mean? If he is not a saint, then he is not a Christian. If he is a Christian, then he is a saint. The trouble is that he has a false conception of what sainthood is. Sometimes in saying this there is an indication of a contempt for the saint. It is not merely that the speaker does not consider himself a saint; there is a quiet undercurrent of satisfaction in his heart that he is not one. That also is born of this false conception of sainthood.

According to the New Testament, a saint is one who is united with the life of Christ. Every Christian is a saint. The burden of the Epistle to the Ephesians is that Paul was writing to the saints in the community of Ephesus, that is, the people there who belonged to Christ. He was saying to them, "You are saints; live as becometh saints." It is possible to be a saint, in the sense of being united with Christ, and yet to fall into the sins of the old life. This is not the Divine will and purpose. God has something better for us than that. But it is a great encouragement to know that although we may sin we do not cease to be Christians. We may act in a way which is unworthy of the precious name we bear, but we do not thereby fall out of the family into which we have been born by the Holy Spirit.

A little boy who had seen the sunshine streaming through the stained-glass window said: "A saint is a person who lets the light shine through." We should reflect the glory of Christ and transmit the light of His gospel. John the Baptist was called a burning and shining light. Some burn without shining. There is a smoke without light. Some are better at whining than at shining. We are to be luminaries in this dark world, pointing others to the Light of the world. It has been said that a saint is one who makes it easier for others to believe that God is love, that Christ is their Saviour, and that the Christian life is the happiest and fullest life of all.

While all believers in Christ are saints, not all are saintly. Many are like the Corinthians, whom the Word of God called saints (I Corinthians 1:2), "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" I Corinthians 3:3. Here is an awful charge against those whom he has just called "saints." It reveals clearly how saints may become very unsaintly and unholy in

their daily walk--not because God wants it this way, but because saints yield to the flesh rather than the Spirit.

I. The Revelation.

1. The saint is the inheritance of God.

Paul prayed that the Ephesian Christians might know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Ephesians 1:18.

As a Christian, I am God's property. I am that by creation. Also, I am His by redemption. I am His by all of His infinite work in me, whereby sin is put away as to its guilt, is being dealt with as to its power, and ultimately will be put away as to its presence.

My personality, which includes intellect, emotion and will, belongs to God. I am not discussing the question of whether or not God has possession. I am discussing the question of His absolute proprietorship. As a saint I belong to Him. I may be using these hands contrary to His will; I may be using these feet to take me on some journey which is out of the way of His appointment; I may be robbing Him, but I belong to Him.

2. The saint is the workmanship of God.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Ephesians 2:10. A saint is one upon whom God is working to a definite end. As God's property, the saint may be most imperfect, but He by the processes of teaching, disciplining, breaking and making is working toward making perfect. This word "workmanship" reminds one of the Old Testament figure of the potter and the clay. The clay is the potter's property. It is that when it is still an inert mass, without form or beauty, and very unattractive. Now watch the potter. He takes the clay and puts it on the wheel. His own foot turns the wheel. His own hands are upon the clay. In the mind of the potter there is a vision of a vessel of beauty and for use. The clay is pliable in the hands of the potter. As the wheel revolves the thought of beauty is translated into a thing of loveliness. "We are His workmanship." Thus God's hand is upon the saint, molding, making, perfecting something of beauty for all the coming ages. I am His workmanship as well as His property.

3. The saint is the habitation of God.

"In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Ephesians 2:22. As the figure changes it becomes more full of beauty and life. A Christian or saint is the home of God, the place into which He comes and rests, the place where there is no chamber locked against Him. Do you have any chamber in this habitation locked against Him? Have you given Him right of way over three fourths of the home, but locked Him out of the other fourth? Why not open all the doors to Him? Hand over the keys to Him. If He comes in, He will change the setting of things in that room to which you have not admitted Him. But He will add to the beauty!

II. The Requirement.

It becometh saints:

1. To be strong.

This truth is brought out clearly in Paul's great prayer for them. "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Ephesians 3:16. Paul knew the need and value of spiritual power in the lives of the saints at Ephesus. He was also conscious of the impotency of men to cope with the evil spiritual forces that are within

and without. It is not the will of God that His people be impotent. It ill becomes the saints to be weak. Our foes are formidable, our tasks are tremendous, and the needs of the world call for an ample supply of the great power of God.

It is a terrible reproach to us to go through all the forms of godliness and use all the beautiful terms of Christian nomenclature, but live powerless lives. To be powerless, when Christ has all power and can give us all we desire and need, is an arraignment to which we can make no answer that is not self-incriminating.

2. To be stable.

Paul brings this out in another petition of his great prayer: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love." Ephesians 3:17. It is strange that so many saints never seem to have any depth. There is no root, and under the burning rays of temptation and trial they wither away.

It is a glorious thing for saints to be "rooted and grounded." It is like a ship securely anchored or a building properly erected on its foundation.

3. To be scholarly.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians was that they "may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." Ephesians 3:18-19. Christianity never puts a premium on ignorance. The last thing which Peter's pen wrote for the Lord was an exhortation to "grow in the grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." II Peter 3:18. Paul commended the Berean saints because they were searchers after the truth, and for this reason he regarded them as being more noble than their Thessalonian neighbors.

Bible study makes for saintly nobility, and to saturate one's mind with divine truth is becoming in the lives of saints. When there is dust on the Bible there is bound to be dirt in the heart of God's saints. Either the Bible keeps us from sinning, or sin will keep us from studying the Book.

4. To be successful.

God never intended for His children to be failures. Since we are Christians, we ought to be successful ones. With this in mind Paul prayed, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Ephesians 3:19. There is no need for any of God's children to be unbalanced so long as divine fulness is available.

We like to see young people succeed in their educational careers, and to see people succeed in business and in professional life. And even more, we delight to see the saints of the Lord successful in all that God has given them to be and to do. Many years ago a goodly number of beehives were carried to the island of Barbados in the West Indies. At first the bees went to work diligently, gathering honey for the coming winter, but, when those bees discovered that they were in a land of perpetual summer, they ceased to gather honey. Instead they spent much of their time flying around and stinging the natives. So it is with Christians sometimes. They have degenerated spiritually. God has surrounded them with so many blessings that instead of working for His glory and for the good of others, they spend most of their time living for self. They thrust the sting when they should be gathering the sweetness of the gospel of Christ to give out to starving men. Only the fulness of God in us can accomplish this.

5. To be saintly.

In Ephesians 4:22-24 we read: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is

created in righteousness and true holiness." There cannot be any real saintliness until we have learned the secret of how to deal with the old man, which is called the flesh in many places in the Scriptures. One will not have to search far until it is discovered. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:11. Here it is in very simple language. Already, so far as salvation is concerned, the old man has been crucified and is a dead thing. In our daily experience we need to recognize what God has done with it and make no provision for it. The Christian may live victoriously and saintly if he will.

6. To be spiritual.

Spirituality is a great asset in the lives of saints, but no one was ever spiritual apart from the Spirit of God Himself. This is why we read in Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."

Paul wrote about three kinds of men--the natural man, the carnal man and the spiritual man. The natural man is unsaved and the one to whom the things of the Word are foolishness. The carnal man is a Christian, but is living, walking and judging after the fashion of the world. He is like the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness, redeemed from bondage, but doing nothing aside from marking time through the unbelief he entertains in his heart. The spiritual man is the one who is controlled by the Spirit of God and whose desire is at all times to put first things first. His heart is filled with the love of God and that peace which passeth all understanding.

Christians, by His grace we have become saints. Now let us so live that we shall manifest to all what He has made us to be "as becometh saints." May everything about our lives, our conversation and our service be as it "becometh saints" to the end that our Lord Jesus Christ shall be glorified thereby.