

**GOOD NEWS**  
for the unsaved  
WORLD!

(#170)  
The nature of a "saint."

1

**Last week we saw...**

- ✓ The Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek words that are translated as "saint" are also translated as "holy one." *They mean the same thing, and the choice of words is strictly a matter of the translator's preference.*
- ✓ The *singular* form of "holy one" is used almost exclusively of God, and in these cases, it is *never* translated as "saint."
- ✓ The *plural* form of "holy one" is used almost exclusively of people (and also heavenly beings, in the Old Testament). The *translator* decides whether to translate it as "holy ones" or "saints" (or a phrase, such as "godly people").

2

**Last week we saw...**

- **When it involves people**, it refers to *groups* of "saved people."
  - ✓ They are *living*, not dead; *on earth*, not in heaven.
  - ✓ They are referred to *as a group* (whether locally or worldwide), not as individuals.
  - ✓ These groups are *not sinless*, though they pursue it. It does *not* indicate a "superior spirituality."
  - ✓ *Groups* of "saints" may be commended for something they have done. But *no individual is singled-out* as being a "saint," who is *more "special"* than the other Christians.
  - ✓ There is *no such thing* as a *saved* person who isn't a "saint."

3

When we consider what the New Testament says about "saints," we realize that they are imperfect people. *But they want to follow Jesus, and they are learning how to do so.*

**The New Testament teaches "saints" how to be "saints"!**

- Much of the New Testament was written to "new-born" Christians, who didn't understand all that it means to "follow Jesus"... *but they were willing to learn.*
- When Paul (and others) explained what it meant to "follow Jesus," those who were genuine "saints" would be willing to learn; but the fakes would eventually fall away (or at least remain unchanged).

The question is: **"Are WE willing to learn?"**

(As we look at these issues, we will sometimes use the word "saint" in its *singular* form. But remember that the Bible's focus is on "saints" in its *plural* form... because we are a *group*, not isolated *individuals*!)

4

**The Apostle Paul is a vivid example of the differences between...**

- ✓ Being a saint and being religious.
- ✓ The change from *not being* a saint to *being* one.

⇒ If religious effort was what mattered, Paul would have been considered one of the most religious of Jews, and surely a recipient of God's favor!

- He had all the right background; he was extreme in his zeal; he was faultless in his pursuit of the best "righteousness" that human effort could produce— Philippians 3:4-6.

Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

Philippians 3:4b (NLT)

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- He was the most "spiritual" of the "spiritual"!  
 I was **advancing** in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely **zealous** for the traditions of my fathers.  
 Galatians 1:14 (NIV)  
 ... as for righteousness based on the law, **faultless**.  
 Philippians 3:6b (NIV)
- Since Christianity *opposes* the use of human effort to attain God's favor – and also requires us to admit who Jesus is – the "*best*" thing that human religion\* can do is to oppose and destroy it!  
 ... as for **zeal, persecuting** the church ...  
 Philippians 3:6a (NIV)  
 For you have heard of ... how intensely I **persecuted** the church of God and **tried to destroy** it.  
 Galatians 1:13 (NIV)

\* (This would include the religion of "atheism." Of course, what human religion might consider "best" is actually the *worst*.)

6

- Even *after* Paul began following Jesus, he could boast everything that anyone else could boast (and more) ... *but only if he acted like a fool.* (Salvation changes one's perspective on all these "accomplishments.")
 

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I *am speaking as a fool*—I also dare to boast about.  
 2 Corinthians 11:21b (NIV)
- 2 Corinthians 11:13-12:12 is an example of his "after-salvation" boast. He was *forced* into doing it because the Corinthians were pursuing *false* teachers, based on *their* boasts. Paul was forced to show that their boasting was worthless talk.
 

I have made a fool of myself, but *you drove me to it.*  
 2 Corinthians 12:11a (NIV)

If these things were what caused a person to be a "saint," then Paul would be the most "saintly" of them all. *But that type of "saintliness" is something that most of us will never be "spiritual enough" to attain.*

⇒ What does a *genuine saint* boast about (if he *does* boast)?

God's goodness, my weakness; "my 'goodness' is garbage" ...

Let the one who boasts, boast in **the Lord.**  
 1 Corinthians 1:31b (CSB)

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them **worthless** because of what Christ has done. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as **garbage** ...  
 Philippians 3:7, 8b (NLT)

If I must boast, I will boast about the things that show **my weakness.**  
 2 Corinthians 11:30 (NET)

**I'm the least** of the apostles. I'm not even fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted God's church.  
 1 Corinthians 15:9 (GW)

- The world might view these responses as nothing more than "self-bashing humility" by someone who is actually the *opposite* – i.e., "super-spiritual." They don't understand the *Bible's* concept of humility – which involves admitting the *truth* about yourself. *Paul said these things because they were true.*

⇒ It is true that Paul told others to follow his example... BUT:

- It was for specific reasons.
- It was because he was following *Christ's* example.
- It was NOT that he was more "special" than the rest of us!*

... we wanted to give you an example to follow.  
 2 Thessalonians 3:9b (NLT)

Displaying GOD'S power in us!

[The Lord] said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."  
 2 Corinthians 12:9a (NLT)

For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.  
 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.  
 1 Corinthians 10:33b-11:1 (NIV)

ONLY to this extent!

ANY *godly* example can be followed!

[We want you] to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.  
 Hebrews 6:12b (NIV)

Paul recognized all *HIS* "religious goodness" for what it really was.

... I was once a **blasphemer** and a **persecutor** and a **violent** man, ...  
 ... the **worst of sinners** ...  
 1 Timothy 1:13b, 16b (NIV)

He also recognized *GOD's* goodness for what it is and what it does.

... I was shown **mercy** because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The **grace** of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the **faith** and **love** that are in Christ Jesus. ...  
 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display **his immense patience** as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.  
 1 Timothy 13c-14, 16 (NIV)

Though I am **the least deserving** of all **God's people** [= "holy ones" or "saints"], he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.  
 Ephesians 3:8 (NLT)

BEFORE: Paul [Saul] wanted to *hurt* the saints.

But Saul was going everywhere to **destroy** the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into **prison**.  
 Acts 8:3 (NLT)

"... I have heard from many people about this man [Saul], how much **harm** he has done to your **saints** in Jerusalem."  
 Acts 9:13b (CSB)

In fact, *I myself was convinced that it was necessary* to do many things in **opposition** to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I actually did this in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in **prison**, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to **death**, I was in agreement against them. In all the synagogues I often **punished** them and tried to make them blaspheme. Since I was terribly **enraged** at them, I **pursued** them even to foreign cities.  
 Acts 26:9-11 (CSB)

AFTER: Everything changed when he *became* a saint!

- The faith he tried to destroy... he now proclaimed it!
- He once persecuted others... now *he* was the one being persecuted!

"He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy."  
 Galatians 1:23b (CSB)

So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*  
 2 Corinthians 12:10 (CSB)

- The very saints he once HURT (in Jerusalem)... he now wanted to HELP!

Right now I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the **saints**, because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the **saints** in Jerusalem. ... Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the **saints**, ...  
 Romans 15:25-26, 31 (CSB)

**BEFORE:**

HOW DARE THOSE CHRISTIANS BLASPHEME THE TRUE GOD!

I MUST DEFEND GOD'S HONOR BY DESTROYING THEM!

**AFTER:**

I WAS THE ONE WHO WAS BLASPHEMING, NOT THEY!

I DENIED WHO JESUS WAS, AND SPOKE EVIL AGAINST HIM!

... I was once a **blasphemer** ...  
1 Timothy 1:13b (NIV)

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WHAT ABOUT IN THE **OLD TESTAMENT**?

SURELY **MOSES** COULD BRAG ABOUT BEING A SPIRITUAL GIANT!

AFTER ALL, HE HAD **FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD!**

The LORD would speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend, ...  
Exodus 33:11a (CSB)

**GUESS AGAIN!**

(Moses was a very **humble** man, more **humble** than anyone else on earth.)  
Numbers 12:3 (GW)

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**The WORLD's "saint."**

HE'S SO SPIRITUAL THAT WE MADE A STATUE OF HIM!

AND NAMED A BUILDING AFTER HIM!

SUCH A SPIRITUAL GIANT!

I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO DO ALL THAT!

[Typical:]

- ✓ Praying every hour of the day!
- ✓ Performing miracles left and right!
- ✓ Constantly helping the poor!
- ✓ Preaching everywhere he goes!
- ✓ Having every virtue mentioned in the dictionary! And then some!

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**The BIBLE's "saint."**

HE'S SO WEAK, HE CAN'T EVEN GET OFF HIS KNEES!

WE NEED A BETTER EXAMPLE THAN THIS!

LORD, I'M SO WEAK... PLEASE TAKE CONTROL OF MY LIFE!

IF YOU DON'T, I WILL FAIL!

WITHOUT YOU, HORRIBLE THINGS WILL OCCUR!

[The Lord] said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."  
2 Corinthians 12:9b (NLT)

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⇒ **The Bible's "saints" provide us with realistic examples.**

- **1 Corinthians 4:16** (+ context) – Not boasting about human leaders (v. 1-7); perhaps also: a willingness to suffer for Christ (v. 8-13).
- **1 Corinthians 11:1** (+ context) – Seeking the good of others, so that they may be saved.
- **Philippians 3:17** (+ context) – Forget the past; press forward toward the goal to which Christ has called us.
- **2 Thessalonians 3:7** (+ context) – Be willing to work for a living, instead of expecting free handouts.
- **1 Timothy 4:12** (+ context) – An example of how to live – involving your speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.
- **Titus 2:7** (+ context) – Doing what is good.
- **Hebrews 6:12** (+ context) – Having faith and patience, instead of laziness.

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[More realistic examples.]

- **Hebrews 13:7** (+ context) – Having faith (trust in God).
- **James 5:10** (+ context) – Patience in the face of suffering.
- **3 John 1:11** (+ context) – Doing what is good.

⇒ **Further examples we can learn from.**

- **Examples of how to live, based on how Christ lived** – There are many of these. Example: 1 Peter 2:21 (+ context) – a willingness to suffer for doing good.
- **Examples of how NOT to live, based on the conduct of the wicked... and the judgments they received** – There are many of these. Example: 2 Peter 2:6 (+ context) – Sodom and Gomorrah show us what is going to happen to the ungodly.

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⇒ What can we LEARN from this?

- **The WORLD** puts "saints" on a pedestal, names buildings after them, and turns them into something that most of us can *never* expect to be.
- **Genuine "saints"** admit their weakness, and provide realistic examples that we can follow... and give us hope for *our own* spiritual growth.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.  
1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)

- **According to the WORLD,**  
↳ only a relatively **FEW** become "saints."
- **According to GOD,**  
↳ **ALL** who follow Jesus are "saints."

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⇒ What can we LEARN from this?

↳ **WE CAN BECOME HOLY!**  
 (IF we are willing to follow Jesus.)

- **The Holy Spirit *makes us holy (sanctified)* – Romans 15:16.**  
↳ So we don't have to rely on our own weak effort.
- **Jesus Christ *is our holiness* – 1 Corinthians 1:30.**  
↳ So we don't need to invent something we *aren't*.
- **We (as a group) are becoming a "holy temple" in Christ – Ephesians 2:21.**  
↳ So we don't have to *build ourselves* into it.
- **We do need to learn God's will in things related to holiness – 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 (is just one example).**  
↳ But God gives us his Word, so we can know his will.

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## OUR MISSION!

⇒ We can learn from the good examples of those who recognized their weaknesses.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.  
1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)

⇒ But we can also learn from the one who's example *they* learned from!

"Come to me, all who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Place my yoke over your shoulders, and **learn from me**, because I am gentle and humble. Then you will find rest for yourselves because my yoke is easy and my burden is light."  
Matthew 11:28-30 (GW)

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⇒ If we're tempted to think we're more special than others... we can learn to redirect our focus!

This is what the LORD says:  
"Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches.  
**But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone:**  
*that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD* who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things.  
I, the LORD, have spoken!  
Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NLT)

**AND FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE!**

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