



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 13th November 2016

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Scripture: Philippians 4 : 20 - 23

Subject: Chapter 4, Part 6 – The Saints of God

They were sitting in the pews on a very bright Sunday morning as the choir had started to sing the first hymn. Young Mary was already starting to get bored, and at 5 years of age she needed to move about. Her mother scolded her and told her to sit quietly in respect for the Lord and His people. So she sat on the seat looking about. For the first time she noticed the stain glass windows and the lovely coloured figures in the glass. She pulled at her mother's coat and asked who these figures were. Her mother replied very softly that they were saints. So Mary looked at them for a moment or two and then asked her mother the question quite loudly, "What do they do, these saints?" Embarrassed that she did not have the answer she replied with the usual, "Shhhh be quiet!". Mary kept looking and just as the choir finished. Mary shout's out, "I know what the saints do! They shine out the light." Not bad for a five-year-old!

When we consider what the apostle had been preaching in this letter, that's exactly what he desires for the church to do, take in the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, live in the light and let their light shine before all men, because the world they were in was darkness and the world they now live in is darkness. So it is with us. We were in the same state and we are



surely living in the same conditions (Ephesians 2:1-4). I must say if you have an Amplified Bible read Ephesians chapter 2 very slowly and it will bless you. Let me quote to you verse 19

“Therefore you are no longer outsiders (exiles, migrants, and aliens, excluded from the rights of citizens), but you now share citizenship with the saints (God's own people, consecrated and set apart for Himself); and you belong to God's [own] household.”

That is quite an exalted position don't you think? It ought to be reason for all of us to praise God aloud unashamedly and not stop.

We come to the end of our studies in this Epistle and what a challenge it has been and no doubt will continue to be. It has been my privilege to spend time in it, and gleaning from its rich truths that will never grow old or be exhausted by any one man or generation of preachers or teachers. It's the living word of God reaching out to commune with our individual hearts and enrich our lives for the glory of God.

The theme of the concluding passage of the book of Philippians is found in the familiar but often misunderstood word **saint**. The word has drifted far from its New Testament meaning, and has been loaded down with all sorts of cultural and religious baggage. To some it has an insulting, 'holier than thou' connotation. They would not call themselves saints for fear of sounding egotistical, boastful, and proud. Others believe saints are those who do remarkable good for humanity. To others the term *saint* conjures up the image of a gaunt, unearthly figure etched in the stained glass window of a cathedral.

Much of the confusion about saints stems from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. A saint in Roman Catholic theology is someone who, because of his or her exemplary virtue, merit, devotion, and religious achievement, is already exalted in heaven (as opposed to the majority of faithful Catholics, who can expect to enter heaven only after a prolonged stay in a place known as "Purgatory" which these days, no-one, not even the Vatican are even sure it exists). A saint is a person in their eyes who is elevated to sainthood by the official decree of the pope known as canonization, and is considered a model whose life is to be emulated.

On the contrary, according to the New Testament, a saint is not an ecclesiast cold relic crystallized in a stained glass window, immortalized in a statue, or canonized by Rome. A saint is anyone who has come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, 'saint' is the apostle Paul's favorite term for Christians, appearing forty times in his epistles. He addressed all the believers in Philippi as saints in the opening verse of this epistle (cross reference Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; Hebrews 13:24). Paul addressed the members of the Corinthian church, which was the most troubled, sin-plagued church in the New Testament, as

"those who have been Sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling"
(1 Corinthians 1:2).

A saint is not a superhero of the faith; a saint is anyone who has eternal life in Christ (Romans 6:23) and from whom the light of Christ shines (Philippians 2:15).

In this concluding portion of his letter to the Philippians, likely written with his own hand as was his custom (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17), Paul reminds them of their identification as saints. He describes the character of saints, the worship of saints, the fellowship of saints, the joy of saints, and the resource of saints.

THE CHARACTER OF SAINTS

(Philippians 4:21,22)

Inherent in the definition of *hagios (saint)* or *hagioi (saints)* is the character or nature of saints. The term can be translated 'set apart ones', 'separated ones', 'sanctified ones', or perhaps best, 'holy ones'. It is also used in the New Testament of the elect angels (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Acts 10:22; Revelation 14:10) and, supremely, of God (Mark 1:24; Luke 1:49; 4:34; John 6:69; 17:11; Acts 2:27; 3:14; 4:27, 30; 13:35; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; 1 John 2:20; Revelation 3:7; 4:8; 6:10; 15:4; 16:5). I hope you will look at these verses they will bless you and help you in your knowledge of the Lord.

God's holiness is His utter separation from sin. A **saint**, therefore, is someone who has been separated from sin to God for holy purposes.

"In Christ Jesus" (v. 21) is the spiritual sphere in which sainthood is the reality; the saints are those who are in Jesus Christ. That reality is unique to Christianity. The adherents of other world religions do not see themselves as being united with their religion's founder; they merely follow his teachings. Yet, Christians do not just believe that Christ lived, died, rose from the dead, and is coming again; they are also in Him in a union of life, it's a real living relationship with Christ now and not just a "hereafter" one (Cross Reference Philippians 1:21; Philippians 4:1; Romans 8:1; Romans 16:11-13; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Corinthians 3:1; 1 Corinthians 7:22; 2 Corinthians 1:2 1; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 5:8; Ephesians 6:10; Colossians 1:2 & 28; Ephesians 4:7).

Therefore, those who are followers of Jesus Christ can say with Paul,

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus Christ sets believers apart to God and made them holy. The writer of Hebrews notes,

"We have been sanctified [set apart to God] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote,

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.... He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21).

Baptism pictures the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Thus, every believer is a saint, because every believer is separated from sin to an eternal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. By calling the Philippians saints, Paul reminded them that they must live as those separated from sin to righteousness. Can't you see how the world (the system we live in) the flesh (yourself, old nature) and the devil would have you believe and behave differently?



THE WORSHIP OF SAINTS

“Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Philippians 4:20)

This paean (song of triumph or hymn of thanksgiving) of praise is a sample of the saints' worship. Saints are not people to be worshiped; they are people who worship. Worship defines the redeemed, and Paul began the concluding portion of Philippians with a doxology. The English word "doxology" comes from two Greek words, *doxa* ("glory") and *logos* ("word"). Thus, a doxology is a word about **glory**; it is an outburst of praise and adoration that honours and ascribes **glory** to God.

Doxologies in Scripture are fitting responses to doctrinal truth. This one flowed from Paul's exuberant joy over the magnificent truths that he had been inspired by God to expound in this letter. True worship flows from divine truth.

In the doxology of Romans 11:33-36, Paul rejoiced and praised God for the monumental truths revealed in Romans chapters 1 to 11 which are one of the most magnificent doctrinal treatise in all of Scripture. He wrote,

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

As he concluded in the last five chapters in Romans, Paul's heart was still overflowing with praise for the marvelous truths it contained:

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27)



In Ephesians, after three chapters of rich doctrinal truth, Paul again burst out in a doxology of praise and worship:

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21).

In Galatians 1:5 Paul penned this brief doxology in anticipation of the truths he would soon share with the Galatians:

"To [God] be the glory forevermore. Amen."

A doxology is also an appropriate response to all that God has done for believers. In gratitude for the wonder of his salvation, Paul wrote:

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).

Facing martyrdom, he could nevertheless confidently exult,

"The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18).

Jude penned a doxology of praise for believers' eternal security:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." (Jude 24-25).

Paul identified the object of his doxology first as **our God**, the **God** whom Christians worship, the only true and living God.

John 5:44 describes Him as "the one and only God";

- John 17:3 as "the only true God";
- Romans 16:27 as "the only wise God"
- 1 Timothy 1:17 and Jude 25 as "the only God."



The pronoun **our**, emphasizes believers' personal relationship with Him; they are to worship the true God in personal, intimate fellowship. As I previously said, the habitual act of worshipping God defines believers. They

"are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

The object of redemption was to make people worshipers. Jesus declared to the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar,

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers" (John 4:23; cross reference with Revelation 5:9; 7:9-10).

Worshipping the true God cannot be done in ignorance. It is impossible to worship Him unless one knows who He is, nor does God want ignorant worship. In Hosea 6:6 God declared,

"I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings"

While Jesus said in John 4:24,

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"

Ignorant worship is unacceptable because it is a form of idolatry. Idolatry is not only worshipping false gods, but also entertaining thoughts about the true God that are untrue and unworthy of Him. A. W Tozer (1975,pp:11) wrote,

"Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this God will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges.

A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God. "Thou thoughtest" said the Lord to the wicked man in the Psalm, "that I was



*altogether such an one as thy self". Surely this must be a serious affront to the Most High God before whom cherubim and seraphim continually do cry,
"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth"*

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him."

The only cure for such idolatry is, for the church as well as individual believers, to make knowing God their primary pursuit. Those with a man-centered theology cannot be obedient worshipers.

A second truth about God that flows out of Paul's doxology is that He is the believers' **Father**. In the New Testament, God is first and foremost the **Father** of the Lord Jesus Christ (cross reference Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 11:31; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:6). This is a fact Jesus attested to by referring to or addressing Him as *"My Father"* nearly forty times in the Gospels. That fact is a proof of Christ's deity. He and the Father share the same common life, the same deity, the same essence. The implication of Jesus' calling God His Father was not lost on the unbelieving Jews, as John 5:18 records:

"For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Paul had in mind here the truth that God is also the **Father** of believers, (Philippians 1:2; cross reference with Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1; 10:29; Romans 8:15; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:16; Philemon 3), whom He has adopted as His children (Romans 8:15,23; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). Unlike pagans, who fearfully approach threatening, aloof, uncaring deities (cf. 1 Kings 18:25-29), believers worship the God who loves them as His children. That causes them to

"Cry out, Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

Believers might be afraid to approach the infinitely wondrous, majestic, and awe-inspiring God but the intimate term **Father** bridges the gap between sinful, finite believers and their infinite, Holy God.

The phrase **forever and ever** indicates the duration of believers' worship of God. The Greek text literally reads "*to the ages of the ages*" and describes

"a very long and indefinite period—the image taken from the cycles or calendars of time, to represent an immeasurable eternity" (Eadie J., 1979, pp:286).

The worship of the saints will not be limited to this life, but will extend throughout all eternity in heaven. To that glorious truth Paul can only add the confessional affirmation **Amen—*"so let it be"***.

I'm going to leave it at that and when we come back we will look at the fellowship of the saints, the joy of the saints, and the resource of the saints.

Amēn.

References:

Eadie J. (1979) *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* [Reprint]; Grand Rapids: Baker. pp: 286

Tozer A.W. (1975) *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: Harper & Row. pp:11