

## What Is A Saint?

Romans 1:7

All Saints  
Reformation Day

Trinity-Albany 10/30/60

## WHAT IS A SAINT?

"To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints." Romans 1:7

"Well, after all, I am no saint!" These were the words I heard from a church member who was trying to justify actions which he himself recognized were far from Christian. His words led me to ask myself a question, "What is a saint?"

There can be several answers. Some branches of the church have a process which an individual has to go through in order to become a saint. May we call these people "official saints." Generally we think of a saint as someone who is withdrawn from ordinary life and who lives in a rather rarified spiritual atmosphere. It is significant, however, that almost all religions, both Christian and non-Christian, have those persons whom they consider saintly.

What do we find in the New Testament? In the first place, we find that ~~the word~~ "saints" are mentioned sixty times. In the second place, we find that the word is almost exclusively used in the plural. We read, not about a saint, but about saints. This is to be expected when we realize that the word refers basically to a gift or to consecration and does not refer to any human achievement. God makes it possible for individuals to be holy within the "communion," within the fellowship. These people are "called to be saints"—they are made holy by their response to this call and they may answer the call only as part of the fellowship. Christianity has no ~~releged~~ individualists. Christians are ~~gaged~~ gaged and strong in so far as they relate themselves to the community. They are summoned by God to be members of his kingdom.

Paul addresses his readers constantly as "saints." In Romans he writes, "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints." In both letters to the Corinthians, in Philippians, Colossians and in Ephesians this term is used as the author addresses the church. In the Epistle of Jude ~~writes~~, "Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Isn't this wonderful? According to the New Testament all Christians are saints! At least they are all called to be saints.

Today I should like to suggest to you some of the essential qualities of the saint. In doing this I want to emphasize the fact that the saint is not intended to be a stuffy, dull, naive, perhaps even a stupid person. The saint is a gambler. He is an adventurer. He is a pioneer. He is a hero. In fact, he is everything we have thought him not to be.

The first characteristic of the saint is faith. If you want to know about saints read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. If you read this chapter in the Revised Standard Version I do not see how you can keep from shouting. "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain... By faith Noah, being warned by God... took heed... and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith... By faith Abraham went out, not knowing where he was to go, for he looked forward to the city which has foundations." And the chapter goes on listing Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others "who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness." In talking about Moses the author writes, "For he endured as seeing him who is invisible." All of the people catalogued in this chapter had committed their lives to something that was bigger than themselves and bigger than anything they had ever known. They are characterized not by ~~some~~ of insipid or vague goodness but by this faith on which they acted. They did not worship it or talk about it; they acted on it and it got them in the most awful messes, but it also put them in the eternal hall of fame. Each of these persons allowed himself to be used of God, allowed himself to become a part of a plan, put himself at God's disposal. "Their faith was more than intellectual assent to a formalized creed. In the words of Isaiah they said, 'Here am I, send me.' The saint does not count personal cost."

In the fourteenth chapter of Luke Jesus talks to the multitudes that accompanied him about the cost of discipleship. He says, "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the

cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" It has occurred to me that this is an example of the irony which Jesus used. I do not think he was advising mere prudence. I think he was saying that when we follow him we throw all prudence aside. Yes, a man who builds a tower has to count the cost to see whether or not he has the resources to finish it. A king who makes war must total up his resources to see if he can finish the war. But they who follow Christ strike off no balance sheet. No, therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Someone asked John Harport Morgan once how much it cost him to maintain his yacht. Mr. Morgan answered, "If you have to ask you should not own a yacht." The saint does not ask the cost. The saint has faith. He has seen a vision, he has dreamed a dream. He has given up his own life to this vision.

The second characteristic of the saint is loyalty. There is something about our modern life that does not encourage loyalty. The old stories about loyalty seem very funny to us today. Perhaps it is because we are so self-centered. Loyalty is the outgrowth of this faith about which we have been talking. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we are told that these saints not only experienced victories, they also suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. We desperately need people with this sort of loyalty. On this Reformation Sunday we think of Luther and Calvin, and John Huss, and Zwingli, and Lyndale and all the others who were loyal to their beliefs.

One reason why our churches have such a hard time today and cannot make a greater impact on their communities is because of this lack of loyalty. We need people who have discovered the meaning of their faith and are as if they did believe it. We Protestants sell out our church too cheaply. We need loyalty in our families. The trouble in many families is that the members do not have an absolute loyalty that transcends selfish desire. So when any sort of trouble comes the home falls apart at the seams. Again and again it

is loyalty alone that will keep a family together. We face a similar situation in our country. Certainly we do not subscribe to the idea of "my country right or wrong." But it is our business as citizens to see that our country is right. We must have this loyalty that will help us make it right regardless of the cost to us.

A third characteristic of the saint is courage. It is this courage that makes the saint a colorful and interesting person. In his Journal Charles Wesley writes about his brother John. He says, "My brother came, delivered out of the mouth of the lion. He looked like a soldier of Christ. His clothes were torn to shreds. The mob carried him about several hours, with a full purpose to murder him. Blow after blow were met with calmness and absence of resentment. The ring-leader moved by this surprising attitude, suddenly became John's rescuer. What thought you of my brother, asked Charles. Think of him! answered the former leader of the mob: that he is a man of God, and God was on his side when so many of us could not kill one man." Did you think the saints were dull?

But there is more to courage than physical courage. Alson J. Smith in "Live All Your Life" tells the story of a mother and a little girl who were walking through the woods and talking about a book in which the daughter had seen the word "courage." "What is courage?" she asked. "Is it when our cat sees a dog ten times bigger, lays back her ears, arches her back, and ~~glits~~ glits at him?" The mother said that she guessed that was courage. They walked a little further and came to a place where the woods had been burned. In the mist of all the burnt things was a yellow buttercup thrusting itself up through the black ash. The mother pointed to the flower and said, "That is courage."

How many times I have seen this happen in the life of a man or a woman. When destruction has blackened everything the courage ~~and~~ soul is able to project light and life up through the blackness. Failure, disappointment, disgrace, sickness, physical pain no often burn over our lives. Many a day I have been strengthened by examples of courage in the lives of ordinary people. There is no credit to us when our lives sail along without incident. There is great credit due those who can find the resources to carry on when seemingly all has been destroyed.

A fourth characteristic of the saints is that they have a relationship to extraordinary spiritual powers. It is at this point that the saint is different from the Stoic or super-man. The saint derives his power from outside himself. This is the reason why an ordinary person can become a saint. What better day to stress this than on Reformation Day. This is a basic doctrine of the Reformation—that all of the resources of God are available to you and to me. There is not saint of old who had anything more than you can have today. Now one saint may be keener than another, one may be more talented, another may have a higher IQ, one may have more training, but if the New Testament teaches anything it teaches that although we differ in talents each one of us has available to him as much spiritual power as he is willing to receive.

Finally, the most unique characteristic of all—the saints were characterized by radiance. Christians are called upon to show what life means to them after it has been touched by Christ. If the saint has found faith, if he has been loyal, if he has been courageous, if he has discovered this source of spiritual power then he should be radiant. What is it that keeps you and me from showing this radiance? Is it feelings of guilt, is it feelings of inadequacy, is it feelings of hostility, is it lack of purpose, is it selfishness, is it greed, is it lack of commitment?

Charles Wesley has an old hymn that is not very good poetry, but it does describe the saints.  
How happy every child of grace,  
Who knows his sins forgiven  
This earth, he cries, is not my place  
I seek my place in heaven  
A country far from mortal sight  
Which yet by faith I see  
The land of rest, the saints delight  
The heaven prepared for me.

O what a blessed hope is ours  
While here on earth we stay  
We more than taste the heavenly powers  
And anticipate that day  
We feel the resurrection near  
Our life in Christ concealed  
And with His glorious presence here  
His life in us revealed."

I like the emphasis in this hymn that one who has discovered the grace of God and who knows his sins are forgiven may have within himself not only the hope of a bright future but may reveal, through his life, the glory of Christ. It seems to me that a radiant person is described. Now we need radiant saints who can bring light to a dark world.

In closing, I should like to change our text just a little and say, "To all God's beloved in Albany, who are called to be saints." Yes, you and you and you, are called to be saints. The creation of saints is the real purpose of the Christian Fellowship and we fail if we, as a church, concern ourselves with anything short of this. I believe that God will redeem the world through men and women like us. He will do it only if we accept our responsibility to be his instruments when we are called to be saints. It is not our function to rail at the world; it is not our function to condemn the world; it is not our function to convince the world by our brilliant reasoning. It is our function to witness to the fact that Christ can transform the lives of men.

But this is the awful thing—you and I can refuse. Every boy and girl here this morning must make this decision ~~somehow~~ You will have to decide whether you are going to keep your life for yourself or make it available for God. If you commit your life to God I do not know what it will mean for you—only the years will show that. But I do know that if you do this that you will not become the unlovely, unattractive, dissatisfied older person who feels that life has passed him by. Adventure awaits the saints. But every one of us, young or old must decide. You either accept the call or you do not. God speaks directly to you. Are you at God's disposal this day? Are you ready to be used by him? I challenge you to say yes and then to see what happens. You are called to be saints.

#### WHAT IS A SAINT?

"To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints." Romans 1:7 RSV

#### I. Introduction

A. Have you ever heard anyone say: "Well, after all, I am no saint."

B. Which has led me to ask this question: what is a saint?

C. There can be several answers

1. Some branches of the church have a very definite teaching about this. It has an official way that a person can be sainted

2. Generally we think of a saint as someone who is withdrawn from ordinary life and who lives in a rather rarified spiritual atmosphere

D. I think it is significant that almost all religions have certain people whom they consider saints.

#### II. What do we find in the New Testament?

A. In the first place saints are mentioned 60 times

B. In the second place the word is almost exclusively used in the plural

1. We read, not about a saint, but about saints
2. In its basic meaning the word is social for it does not refer to any human achievement but to a gift, or consecration.
3. Holiness is available to individuals only in the community. It has been said: "One can be a 'saint' only in the communion"

C. These people are "called saints"—they are made holy by God's call which they obeyed when He summoned them into his kingdom.

C. Paul addresses his readers constantly as "saints"

1. In Romans: "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints."
2. In 1 Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians, in Ephesians in Philippians, Colossians, the author uses the term as he addresses the church.

D. In the letter of Jude we read: "BELOVED, BEING VERY RAGER TO WRITE TO YOU OF OUR COMMON SALVATION, I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO WRITE APPEALING TO YOU TO CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS."

E. Isn't this wonderful! According to the New Testament, all Christians are saints! At least they are all called to be saints!

III. Today I should like to suggest to you some of the essential qualities of the saint. In doing this I want to emphasize the fact that the saint is not intended to be a stuffy, dull, perhaps even stupid or naive person. The saint is a gambler, he is an adventurer, he is a pioneer, he is a hero—in fact he is everything we have thought him NOT to be.

A. The first essential is faith

1. If you want to know about the saints read the 11th chapter of Hebrews

a. If you read it in the RSV I cannot see how you can keep from shouting

b. In telling of Moses it says: "FOR HE ENDURED AS SEEING HIM WHO IS INVISIBLE"

2. All of the people catalogued in this chapter have committed their lives to something that is bigger than themselves.

3. Not a sort of diffused sense of goodness but faith is the thing that characterizes them

4. And they act on this faith, not just talk about it—and it gets them in the most awful messes, but it also puts them in the eternal hall of fame.

5. This faith is a mental and spiritual submission by which each allowed himself to be built into the plan which God had for the world

6. These men are at God's disposal

B. This leads to the second characteristic which is loyalty.

1. There is something about our modern life that does not encourage loyalty

2. The old stories of loyalty sound corny to us today

3. Yet, if you take loyalty out of life you have erased something great and splendid—and if you never know what it is to be loyal you have never lived.

h. One reason why our churches cannot make a greater impact on the community is because of a lack of loyalty

a. It must be grounded in the faith that the thing the church is doing is important

b. But do you know that if you act before people as if you really believed your church was important—it would become much greater than it now is.

c. We desperately need people who have the conviction of a Luther, a Calvin, a Wesley, a Daniel, a Paul.

d. Don't sell your church cheaply

5. We need family loyalty

6. We need loyalty to our country

#### C. A fourth characteristic of the saint is courage

1. Charles Wesley tells this in his Journal about his brother John: "MY BROTHER CAME, DELIVERED OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE LION. HE LOOKED LIKE A SOLDIER OF CHRIST. HIS CLOTHES WERE TORN TO TATTERS. THE MOB OF WENDESBURY, DARLINGTON, AND WALSALL WERE PERMITTED TO TAKE HIM BY NIGHT AND CARRY HIM ABOUT SEVERAL HOURS, WITH A FULL PURPOSE TO MURDER HIM. SCOUTS OF DRAW HIM, HANG HIM AND BLOW AFTER BLOW, WERE MET WITH CALMNESS AND ABSENCE OF RESENTMENT. THE RING-LEADER MOVED BY THIS SURPRISING ATTITUDE, SUDDENLY BECAME JOHN'S RESCUER, CARRIED HIM THROUGH THE RIVER UPON HIS SHOULDERS, AND HIMSELF SHORTLY AFTER JOINED THE METHODIST. WHAT THOUGHT YOU OF MY BROTHER, ASKED CHARLES. THINK OF HIM! ANSWERED THE FORMER LEADER OF THE MOB: THAT HE IS A MAN OF GOD! AND GOD WAS ON HIS SIDE WHEN SO MANY OF US COULD NOT KILL ONE MAN."

Did you say that saints were dull!

2. Mother and child walking through woods—little girl talking about a book in which she had seen the word "courage". What is courage? Is it what the cat has when she sees a dog and even though he is ten times bigger lays back her ears and cowers at him? The mother considered and said, yes, partly. "THEY WALKED ON A LITTLE WAY AND CAME TO A PLACE WHERE THE WOODS HAD BEEN BURNED AND THE FURTEST FLOOR WAS BLACK AND BAKEN. THERE IN THE MIDST OF THE CHARRED WOOD AND BURNED

STUMBLE WAS A YELLOW BUTTERCUP THRUSTING ITSELF UP THROUGH THE BLACKNESS. THE MOTHER POINTED TO THE FLOWER. "THAT'S MORE LIKE IT SHE SAID. THAT'S COURAGE."

3. At General Conference I heard an officer of the White Supremacy group give a rapid speech against integration. A minister, a member of this man's own delegation got up and answered him.

4. A man or a woman or a boy or a girl doing what he thinks is right in the face of popular disapproval or the laughter, the terrible mocking laughter of the gang—that is courage

5. Picking up the pieces of your life after it is broken—that is courage

D. A fourth characteristic of the saints is that they have a relationship to extraordinary spiritual powers.

1. Now it is at this point that the saint, in a religious sense, is different from the so-called super-man

2. The saint derives his power from outside himself

3. This is the reason why an ordinary person can become a saint.

4. This is important on this day when we celebrate the Reformation

on October 30, Luther was supposed to have taken his stand against the established church.

b. Everyone of you has available all of the resources used by the saints

c. Now one saint may be keener than another, one may be more talented, one may have a higher IQ, one may have more training, but if the NT teaches anything it teaches that although we differ in the quantity of this or that each one of us has available for him as much spiritual power as he is willing to receive.



## References What Is A Saint?

- "Jesus Begins His Living" - Kepler
- Harpers Bible Dictionary
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- "Mysticism's Bowtie In Theological Perspective" - Schelling
- "A Devout Reader's Notebook" - Kennedy

## Methodism and Society In Theological Perspective Schelling

"In one sermon (Wesley) declared that however strong our faith, 'it will never save us from hell, unless it now save us from all unholiness; from pride, passion, impatience; from all arrogance of spirit, all haughtiness and over-bearing; from wrath, anger, and over-bearing; from envy, anger, bitterness; from discontent, murmuring, fretfulness, peevishness.' We are all indeed called to be saints, and the very name of Christian means no less."

see "True Christianity, We founded a sermon by Wesley."

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- E. Finally, the most unique thing of all -- a saint is characterized by radiance
1. The early Christians were called upon to to show what life meant to them after it had been touched by Christ
  2. It is here that Christianity becomes more than an intellectual exercise.
  3. This indicates a quality of life that makes it different.
    - a. Kennedy says: "For unlovely lives can believe intellectually in good things."
    - b. Sainthood has seemed unattractive to us because some who have mistakenly called saints were unattractive
    - c. "To live with the saints in Heaven is bliss and glory; To live with the saints on earth is -- often another story."
    - d. This should not be so.
    - e. If the saint has found faith, if he has been loyal, if he has been courageous, if he has discovered this source of spiritual power -- then he will be radiant.
  5. What is it that keeps you and me from showing this radiance?
    - a. Feelings of guilt
    - b. Feelings of inadequacy
    - c. Lack of purpose
    - d. Selfishness
    - e. Greed
    - f. Lack of commitment
  6. Charles Wesley has an old hymn
 

How happy every child of grace,  
Who knows his sins forgiven  
This earth, he cries, is not my place  
I seek my place in heaven  
A country far from mortal sight  
Which yet by faith I see  
The land of rest, the saints delight  
The heaven prepared for me.

O what a blessed hope is ours  
While here on earth we stay  
We more than taste the heavenly powers  
And anticipate that day  
We feel the resurrection near  
Our life in Christ concealed  
And with his glorious presence here  
His life in us revealed.

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- IV. I am changing our text just a little now -- To all God's beloved in Albany, who are called to be saints
- A. Yes you are called to be saints
1. The creation of saints is the purpose of the Christian fellowship
  2. We fail if we, as a church, concern ourselves with anything else; anything short of this
- B. I believe that God will redeem the world through men and women like us
1. If we accept our responsibility to be his instruments then we are called to be saints
  2. It is not our function to rail at the world
  3. It is not our function to convince the world by our brilliant reasoning
  4. It is our function to witness to the fact That Christ can transform the lives of men
- C. But this is the awful thing -- you and I can refuse
1. Every boy and girl here this morning must make this decision
    - a. You will have to decide whether you are going to keep your life for yourself or make it available for God
    - b. If you commit your life to God I do not know what it will mean for you--only the years will show that
    - c. But I do know that if you do that you will not become the unlovely, unattractive dissatisfied older person who feels that life has passed him by.
    - d. Adventure awaits you
  2. Every one of us must decide every morning what he is going to do.
    - a. You either accept the call or you do not
    - b. God speaks directly to you
    - c. Are you at God's disposal? Are you ready to be used by him?  
I challenge you to say yes and then see what happens. Don't be surprised!

"In one sermon (Wesley) declared that however strong our faith it will never save us from hell, unless it now save us from all unholiness; from pride, passion, impatience; from all arrogance of spirit, all haughtiness and over-bearing; from wrath, anger, bitterness; from discontent, murmuring, fretfulness, peevishness. WE ARE ALL INDEED CALLED TO BE SAINTS, AND THE VERY NAME OF CHRISTIAN MEANS NO LESS."

The time has come for us to take Christianity seriously and Wesley regarding it as a plaything, which we take up in our leisure.



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"Perhaps the greatest departure from Jesus that modern Christians have taken is their refusal to believe that the quality of a man's life is the ultimate thing."

"It is not an brilliance whose lies are chief virtues from God, but it is the humble devotion to His cause, and in love for His brethren."

A good man "is the answer to all of our doubts."

"The most refreshing, encouraging experience now here is to be met by someone who has heard Christ call to be a saint."

## Hymns And The Saints

### Pantley

"... according to the Church's use of the word, based on the Bible, it is neither true to say that a saint is by definition a nice person nor that a saint is a dull person."

The quality essential to sainthood is faith.

The truth about the saints is told in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews where we have their famous catalogue of those of Old Testament history. Of course, if anybody wants to know just what a saint is, and just how a saint can be expected to help him, it is all there."

"The character that they all share is not goodness in a diffused sense, nor spectacular and sustained power. The character they share is faith."

"For faith in all these cases is the act of mental and spiritual submission by which each one of these allowed himself to be thrust into the plan which God had for the world."

"The only ultimate question concerning any man, according to that mysterious but quite unambiguous common mind of the Bible, is whether or not he is at God's disposal; and whether he lives on the assumption that God is best."

"A special evening of faith is the desire, here and now, to be secure and in command of the situation."

Material security is a familiar enough ideal, but moral security is perhaps the worse of the two."

"You saint is likely to be difficult to shock, because he has a firm hold on essentials and can afford a resilient mind."

"You saint will travel light because only a man who is frightened of how he will appear to other people carries an enormous portmanteau wherever he goes."

"The fundamental thing is that the ready and alert person is in fact used by God."

"Faintly qualities are outward signs of that quality of mind and will which makes a man ready for the signal, and able when it comes to interpret it and act on it without a second's delay."

"Either you are helping or you are not. Either you are on duty or you are a passenger."

In ancient times there were patron saints for all the guilds of trade, for the good reason, as Chesterton said somewhere, that it helps plumbers to know that there was once a perfect being who really did plumb."