

Saints Alive

The Gospel Truth – Part VI

Romans 1:6-7

Introduction

I would like to read a parable that someone recently sent to me.

Once upon a time there was a shepherd tending his sheep at the edge of a country road. A brand new Jeep Grand Cherokee screeched to a halt next to him. The driver, a man dressed in a designer suit, expensive shoes, flashy wristwatch, and sunglasses, asks the shepherd, "Say, if I can guess how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?"

The shepherd looked the man over and then, looked at the sprawling field of sheep, and said, "Alright."

The young executive parked his SUV (sports utility vehicle), connected his notebook computer and wireless modem, entered a NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) site, scanned the ground using his GPS (global positioning system), opened a data base, then printed his report on a mini printer. He turned to the shepherd and said, "You have exactly 1,586 sheep in your flock."

The shepherd answered, "That's right! Wow, you may have one of my sheep."

The young man took one of the animals and put it in the back of his Jeep. The shepherd called out and said, "Hey, before you leave, if I guess your profession, will you pay me back?"

The executive smiled and said, "Sure, go ahead and try."

The shepherd said, "You're a consultant."

The man said, "That's right, but how did you know?"

The shepherd responded, "Very simple. First you came here without being called. Second, you charged me to tell me something I already knew. Third, you really don't understand anything about my business and . . . I'd really like to have my dog back."

Review

In our last discussion, we discovered that it was possible for people who look good; who sound spiritually tuned in; who have all the religious equipment, to, in the final analysis, not know the difference between genuine faith and deceived faith. Or, to put it in the words of that parable, they do not really know the difference between a dog and a sheep.

Even more tragic is that they are traveling down the highway of life, believing they have packed the genuine article, when, in reality, they have been deceived. And, the deception is rampant. It is so widespread, in fact, that we uncovered a moment in the future, revealed in Matthew's gospel, chapter 7, when masses of religious people will stand before Jesus Christ, only to receive an unexpected judgment. These people had had miracle working, healing, prophetic ministries, and did it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, yet, at that moment, verse 23 tells us that Jesus, the Judge, will say,

. . . I never knew you . . .

In that group are pastors and Sunday school teachers, evangelists and deacons, well-known miracle workers and healers, Bible study leaders and denominational heads. These are people that you would never dream of ever being deceived, yet, at

that moment, all of them come face to face with the true reality of their deception.

It is no wonder that Paul commanded the church family to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, lest they fail the test. It is no wonder that Peter challenged the church members to make their calling and election sure, by saying, in II Peter, chapter 1, verse 10a,

... brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you .

..

I frankly believe the desire and submission to that kind of evaluation is as much a proof of genuine faith as anything else. In fact, the world is never told to evaluate its faith, it is the person, laying claim to Christ, who is told to examine himself.

Ask yourself these hard questions:

- Is there an internal affection for Christ?
- Is there any shame over the slightest sin?
- Is there submission to the things of Christ, motivated, not by pride, money, applause, the promise of blessings, or for the sake of comfort, but simply by the surrendered passion to please, obey, and honor my Lord from my heart with my life?

You might say, “But won’t that kind of evaluation produce doubt?”

If done prayerfully, with the Scripture as your guide, and with the Spirit of God as your evaluator, it will not produce doubt; it will produce depth. Your faith will not be destroyed; it will be deepened.

Paul referred to that deep genuine faith in Romans, chapter 1, verse 5, as a faith that is obedient, saying,

through whom [Jesus Christ our Lord] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith . . .

Obedience and faith in this verse are seen as synonyms of the true believer. It is faith that works. As we have said, “*Saving faith comes independently of any works, but saving, genuine faith works.*”

Now, for the first time in Paul’s declaration of the gospel truth, he addresses the readers of this letter to the Romans in a personal way. Look at chapter 1, verses 6 through 7a.

Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints . . .

Called to Belong – “called of Jesus Christ”

You cannot help but notice the repetition of a word that is used three times in the first seven verses of Romans by the apostle Paul. In:

- verse 1, we have previously read that Paul informs the reader that his calling is that of an apostle,
- verse 6, he says we are called of Jesus Christ, and
- verse 7, he says that we are called as saints.

You get the idea that this word “calling” or “called,” which is “kletos (κλετοσ)” in the Greek, is a key word that communicates a volume of truth. The verb form of this word is “kaleo (καλεω),” which transliterated, simply means “to call”. It is interesting that the Greek word for “church” is another form of this same word. The word is “eiskaleo (εισκαλεο),” which means, “to call out”. Thus, the church is an assembly of “called out” ones.

God is in the process of calling out those who will be saved and then, forming of them, the body of Christ. Paul’s description, in these verses, is that they are literally, called to belong to Jesus Christ.

The idea is one of possession. If, after church, you saw my four children standing around waiting for Dad, as they usually are, and someone asked you, “Hey, whose children are those?”

If they are behaving, you could say, “Those are Marsha Davey’s.”

She deserves the credit. If they are misbehaving, however, you should say, “You know, I don’t know who those children are.”

You could read Paul’s statement, in verse 6, to emphasize the possessive nature, by reading it this way, “They are called Jesus Christ’s.”

Whose child are you? You are Jesus Christ’s child. And you happen to have His name! You have the name “Christian”. In the same way that my children have the name Davey, because they are my offspring, you have the name Christian, because you are His offspring.

In a similar way, you are called a North Carolinian, because you happen to reside in the state of North Carolina, although few of you by birth. And, you are also called an American, most of you by birth, because your citizenship happens to be in America.

You have certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities as a North Carolinian and as an

American. One of which, by the way, is voting. I encourage you to think through the issues and then vote. Do not dare neglect to vote and then complain about who was elected.

You are a North Carolinian because you live in North Carolina; you are an American because you live America. And, you are a Christian because you live in Christ. As one who lives in Christ, your citizenship then, Paul wrote in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 20,

... is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

And, as he wrote in Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 19,

... you are fellow citizens of the saints . . .

Frankly, I believe the more mindful we are of our citizenship in heaven, the greater good we are as citizens on earth. The more committed we are to our responsibilities as citizens of the heavenly city, the more responsible we will be as citizens in this city.

In other words, Paul is saying, "We are called by Christ for His personal possession."

That is who a Christian is.

One author, that I read recently, commented on his own conversion during his first year in college. He and a college buddy were exposed to the gospel one night and, as a result, both "accepted Christ". For this author, life would never be the same. His friend, however, came down from his room the next morning and said, "Wasn't that the craziest thing we did last night. I guess I just got carried away. You won't tell anyone about it will you?"

That friend had heard only the call of the preacher. The author, however, had heard the effectual call of Christ. It had produced in him, genuine faith to believe, and made of him, a new man in Christ Jesus. He was now possessed by and for Jesus Christ.

Called to be Loved – "beloved of God"

We are not only called to belong to Jesus Christ, but Paul goes on to say in Romans, chapter 1, verse 7, that true believers are,

... beloved by God . . .

The word "beloved" is a special word that is reserved only for the children of God. While God has a general love for the whole world, and while God has a sustaining love, even for His enemies, so that it rains upon their crops and the same sun that

His children enjoy warms them, this phrase is unique and only used for His precious possession.

You may remember that the first time this word appeared in the New Testament was when Jesus Christ began his earthly ministry. The Father spoke from heaven and said, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 3, verse 17,

... This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.

Do you know what it means to be the beloved of God? Do you think of yourself in this way? Oh, that you would let this truth penetrate your heart today. You are God's special possession and He deeply, eternally, faithfully, attentively, deliberately, unfailingly loves you. You are His beloved.

I cannot help but believe that Paul's next phrase was intended to speak volumes to the believers. Notice verse 7 again,

... to all who are beloved of God in Rome . . .

That was another way of saying, "God knows exactly where you live."

You have not, in some way, slipped out of His peripheral vision. You have not moved to a new location, while He was not paying attention, so that now, although He is trying, He just cannot seem to find you.

If there were a group of believers who might have wondered whether God even knew where they lived, it would have been the Romans. At this point, the apostle Paul, or any apostle for that matter, has not visited them. Their church was not planted by an official delegation of believers. In fact, from everything we know, they were chartered by people who had returned from Jerusalem during Pentecost, when Peter preached the first sermon and three thousand believed. Acts, chapter 2, verse 10, tells us that there were visitors in Jerusalem from Rome. Evidently, they had converted to Christ, had gone back to Rome, and had formed that early church.

What a city in which to try to build a church. This was Rome, Italy. It was the place of the powerful; the home of Nero. It was also "sin city," for one of its own historians called Rome, "the cesspool of iniquity". This was the place of the gladiators and the gamblers; this was the home of religious prostitution and superstition; this was the city where tens of thousands crowded into the Coliseum to watch the chariot races. It was San Francisco, Las Vegas, New York, and Washington, D.C. all rolled into one.

How could the church in Rome ever hope to compete for the hearts of mankind? And, what an easy place to become discouraged in your pursuit of holiness. Oh, what temptation; what an easy place to fail. How easy there, to think, “Surely God wouldn’t care as much about us, in Rome, as He would His church in Jerusalem or Antioch.”

Has it ever occurred to you that God never wrote a letter specifically to the believers in Jerusalem? He did, however, write a letter, through His servant Paul, specifically to the believers who lived in Rome. God did not want them to forget that He was aware of not only who they were, but also, where they were.

Wow! The letter to the Romans is a personal letter from the heart of God. And, at the very beginning of the letter, He calls them His beloved!

Called to be Holy – “called saints”

There is one more calling. They have been called to belong to Jesus Christ; they have been called the beloved of God; and in verse 7, Paul writes they have been,

... called as saints ...

The Greek word for “saints,” in this verse, is “hagios (ἅγιος),” which means, “holy ones”. The Latin translation of “hagios” is “sanctus,” which gives us our word, “saint”. Saints then, are the holy ones.

Now carefully notice that any words in your text that are italicized have been added by the translators to give clarity. Often, however, as in this case, they actually obscure the impact of truth. We are not:

- “called to be saints,” as the King James Version and the New International Version translate this, nor
- “called as saints,” as the New American Standard Bible translates this, which is closer to the original meaning, but, I believe, still obscures the weight of Paul’s statement.

Paul simply wrote, “to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called saints . . .”.

There is a vast difference between being called to become a saint and simply being called a saint. To be called to become a saint is a goal you try to attain; to be called a saint is a position you already have. If God called you to become a saint, then you had better “give it your best shot”.

The Roman Catholic church teaches that sainthood must be earned and is only for a few

special people. If you would like to be a saint, then first, you have to die and be dead for at least one hundred fifty years. Then, an application is made, by someone living, to the ecclesiastical authority. Meanwhile, you happen to be suffering in purgatory, paying the penalty for those times when you were not so saintly. Finally, the church agrees to view your case and appoints a committee known as the “avocatus diaboli,” or the “Devil’s Advocate”.

Any known evidence of your times that were lacking in saintly behavior is collected, as well as evidence of miracles or healings that occurred by your hand, at your grave, or through some relic belonging to you. Then, a trial is held and both sides are presented. If the evidence of your saintliness outweighs the evidence of your sinfulness, the highest ecclesiastical order can pronounce you a saint. You immediately, are taken out of purgatory and into the bliss of heaven, where you receive the prayers of people still on earth.

There is one problem with this entire application process, and that is, none of it has any biblical basis whatsoever. There is not one single verse in the Bible to support it. In fact, the Bible usually refers to a saint as someone who has not been dead for one hundred fifty or more years.

Paul wrote to the Christians:

- in Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 1,
... to the saints who are at Ephesus ...
- in Philippians, chapter 1, verse 1,
... to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi ...
- and again, in Colossians, chapter 1, verse 2,
to the saints ... in ... Colossae ...

These people were very much alive at the time!

Positional Application

According to the Bible, sainthood is not the goal of the believer, it is the position of every believer.

Our position from time past

It has been our position from time past. Paul wrote, in Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 4,

... He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy [saints] and blameless before Him ...

Our benefit in the present

It is also our current position, which produces many benefits. Paul mentions one of the benefits in Romans, chapter 8, verse 27,

. . . He [the Spirit] intercedes for the saints . . .

If we were not saints, we would have no claim to the promise of the Holy Spirit's intercession on our behalf.

Our promise for the future

There are past, present, and future promises related to the fact that we are, here and now, saints.

God never goes to a sinner and tells him to try to attain to sainthood. No, He picks us up out of the mud of sin and says, "You are now one of My holy ones."

How can He call us saints? He can say that, my friends, not because we have intrinsic righteousness or because we have done righteous things, but because we have the righteousness of Christ deposited to our bankrupt account. Romans, chapter 5, verse 17b, tells us that,

. . . those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through . . . Jesus Christ.

The only difference between a sinner and a saint is the Savior and His gift of righteousness. That is positional, biblical truth.

Now, the word "holy," translated as "saint," means, "set apart or separate". To be God's holy one or God's saint, means that you are "set apart unto Him".

We use that same word, "holy," in another context in our culture. We attach the word "holy" to "matrimony," and call it "holy matrimony". And, the wedding ceremony is a ceremony that "sets apart" the bride and the groom unto each other.

The ceremony of holy matrimony does not change the character or personality of the bride or groom. In fact, several weeks after their wedding, they are going to realize just how much they had better change. However, something did happen to them during that ceremony of holy matrimony that was immediate. Their character did not change; their personalities did not change, that will take the rest of their lives, but their status changed.

They walked up that aisle as two independent people who could have belonged to anybody; they walked back down that aisle belonging to each other. They walked in as two single individuals; they

walked out as a married couple, legally and morally bound to one another.

When you became a believer you immediately became the bride of Christ; His holy one. And, while the Lord is going to change your heart and your character over the course of your life, your status changed immediately – you now belong to Him.

Practical Authenticity

Now, this positional truth has a practical application.

I was born into the Davey family. I can remember many times, as I was growing up, when I went out to play or, even later, when I got the keys to the car and headed out the door, my mother and father would tell me, "Don't forget what your last name is."

They were telling me that my behavior needed to match my status. We read the same challenge in the Bible, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 3,

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among the saints

In other words, while you are not a saint because you are saintly, you are to live saintly because you are a saint. You are to pursue a life of holiness because you are one of God's holy ones.

The same thought comes through in Galatians, chapter 5, verse 25,

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

In Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 22 and 24, as well, Paul wrote,

. . . lay aside the old self . . . and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Peter wrote in I Peter, chapter 1, verses 14 through 16,

. . . do not be conformed to the former lusts . . . but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

In other words, act your name!

You might say, "That's an awfully high standard!"

It is. And, God does not lower the standard; He empowers the saint.

A Wall Street Journal article reported that the Board of Education for the city of San Francisco had recently met. They had learned that nearly one out of every three of San Francisco's high school seniors would not be graduating on schedule because they were not meeting graduation requirements. So, what did the San Francisco Board of Education promptly do? They lowered the requirements for graduation.

Frankly, I expect the world system to "dumb down" to whatever level people seem to be able to meet. Certainly our culture seems to believe that among the worst of sins in the entire world, is a low self-image that comes from failing.

I am, however, more disturbed when the church does the same thing. Just recently, an Associated Press news article caught my eye. It read,

Acknowledging that many divorcing couples suffer guilt over the end of a marriage, a bishop in Hanover, Germany, says it is time the church stepped in to help people better deal with the pain. Margo Kiesman, a bishop for the German Protestant church, suggested today, that churches introduce a special religious end-of-marriage ceremony. "A lot of people have problems of conscience after divorce, so a separation ceremony would help them, and their children, cope," she told the daily German newspaper. Kiesman suggested the whole family would meet in church to renounce the marriage vows.

The truth is, sometimes saints divorce; sometimes saints fail their high school class; sometimes saints commit many other sins. However, the biblical standard of living for saints does not change to accommodate the sins of the saints. It does not lower itself so that we feel better about our failure.

The sign of a true saint, in fact, is an admission of sin as sin and a full confession of that sin to the

Savior. The sign of a true saint is that they are troubled by their sinful acts, sinful motives, and sinful heart. They are deeply grieved any time they do not live up to their name.

Saints today, are in the process of discovering that, if living the life of a saint were something we could do easily or on our own, we would never depend upon the Holy Spirit; we would never need to exchange our weakness for Christ's strength; we would never need the Father's guidance and wisdom. The Word of God would be a manual that we would look at every once in awhile. Who would really need it?

The opposite is true, however, isn't it? The person who is pursuing holiness and pursuing that attitude that sets its affections on things above, has discovered that living like a saint is not just difficult, it is impossible. Left to ourselves, we would not know the difference between a dog and a sheep!

The standards of holy motive, holy affection, holy thinking, and holy living are impossible to experience unless, first, we have been called by Christ to belong to Him (for without Him we can do nothing), and secondly, we rest on the fact that we are deeply loved by God (otherwise our efforts are cold and impassive), and thirdly, we recognize our status as saints, or holy ones, set apart unto our God. Then, we will desire nothing less than a life that lives up to our name.

We are:

- Called to belong to Christ!
- Called beloved of God!
- Called a saint – to live a holy life!

So, as you go out into your world, do not forget to Whom you belong, do not forget Who deeply loves you, and do not forget what your name is, for the glory of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/5/2000 by Stephen Davey.

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