

## **The Saint**

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1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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Once there were two evil brothers. They were both rich, and used their money to keep their evil ways from the public eye. They even attended the same church, and appeared to the undiscerning to be perfect Christians. Then one day the old pastor retired, and a new one was hired. Not only could the new pastor see right through the brother's deception, but he also spoke a powerful, no nonsense message, and the church membership grew in numbers. Soon a fund-raising campaign was started to build a new and larger assembly.

All of a sudden, one of the brothers died. The remaining brother sought out the new pastor the day before the funeral and handed him a very large sum of money to finish paying for the new building. "I have only one condition," he said. "At the funeral, you must tell the congregation that my brother was a saint." The pastor thought for a moment, gave his word, and took and deposited the money in the bank.

The next day at the funeral, the pastor did not hold back; he let it fly. "He was an evil man," he said. "He was a liar and a crook. He was greedy and spiteful. He cheated on his wife and abused his family." After going on like this for several more minutes, he finally concluded, "But (pointing to the deceased's brother), compared to his brother over there, this man was a saint!"

That's the problem with most of us. We compare our life with the lives of others and figure that as long as we're one or two steps above them on the morality ladder, we're doing okay. And if that's the case, then we are no different than the Christians living in Corinth.

The city of Corinth today is a small, insignificant town. But in New Testament times it was a thriving, prosperous city. They were a people of diverse culture and background (Greek, Roman, Jew, European, and Asian). They also were quite wealthy. And with that great wealth came great wickedness. The Apostle Paul alludes to the moral depravity of this town in 1 Corinthians 6 – Pornography, Idol

Worship, Adultery, Prostitution, Homosexuality, Stealing, Greed, Drunkenness, Abusive speech, and Cheating. Corinth was very rich, yet so wicked, a fact well known throughout the rest of the Roman Empire.

Well, it was into this city that Paul begins to preach. And soon a church is born. But it seemed that this church had a real problem with letting go of the things of this world. Paul received word that a member of this church was having an affair with his stepmother, and the church was boasting about this (*Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-6*)! And lest you think this meant the evil & wicked people of the city, listen to what Paul says just a few verses later (*Read verses 9-11*).

Corinth, it seemed, was a church that was content to stay one step above the world's morality. But that still meant that they were headed in the wrong direction. The church was still moving downward along with the rest of the world. This is why in almost all of 1 Corinthians Paul reminds them of their calling; of who they are, and what they have received from God because of their belief in Christ Jesus. Paul even goes so far to remind them that they are saints. (*Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9*)

Did you notice what Paul said in verse 2? *"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."* In his letter to this church filled with worldliness, Paul reminds them that they have been sanctified in Christ Jesus and are Saints by calling.

Doesn't it seem a bit odd that Paul would call these people Saints? They sure were not acting like saints. But see, that's the whole point. A person does not become a saint because they act like one. You don't become a saint because some religious organization has granted you that title. You are not a saint once you reach a certain age. You are a saint (A Holy One or One Set Apart) because you have been set apart from sin (sanctified) and made holy by Christ Jesus. Paul begins this letter reminding the Corinthian believers that they are saints, not because of an absence of sin, but because of the work of Christ. A person has Sainthood conferred upon them by God. And I think Paul was trying to remind this church what they were.

According to scripture, every believer in Jesus Christ, whether faithful or unfaithful, is a “Set Apart” person, a “Holy Person”, a “Saint”. We are holy because the Sanctifier has already made us holy. It is Christ’s work, not our own, which makes us holy. By His sacrificial work upon the cross, Jesus Sanctifies (makes holy) all who believe in Him; He sets them apart for Himself. Our part is to claim His holiness, to claim sainthood by faith in the Son. Oh sure, not one of us is worthy of that title, but God has declared us to be saints because of our trust in His Son Jesus.

So sure, it does seem a bit odd that Paul would address this troubled church as Saints. But I think he did this on purpose. “Look at what you are” he says. “Look at what you have”! And he reminds them that if this is who they are, and if Sainthood is what they have, then their actions should demonstrate this. They should not be content to simply be better than the world, but be different than the world.

Sometimes I think we need to be reminded of the same thing. Sometimes I think we forget that God has given us Sainthood because of our belief in His Son. Sometimes I think we forget who we are. And sometimes I think we are merely content to be just a step or two above the world. But the Church needs to be altogether different than the world. And we Christians need to understand the role God is asking us to play during our time here on earth.

It is the Christian who remembers they are a Saint which makes the worldly conduct of others look so wicked and depraved. It is the Saintly minded Christian who shows the world what generosity, patience, kindness, peace, and love truly look like. Tell me, if it were not for the Holy Ones living among us, would the world know of their sexual sin? And you, my friend, you who have placed your trust in Jesus, have been made a Saint by God. Shouldn’t you be acting like one as well?