

Saints

by Paul R. Blake

“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:1-2).

By speaking of saints, bishops, and deacons, Paul concisely outlines the divinely mandated organization of the local church. God ordained that local churches must be autonomous and self-governed in the expedient application of authorized works for the local church and in practical handling of matters of judgment on a local basis. He directed that each local congregation of saints be overseen by bishops who are assisted by deacons.

He addresses this letter to all of the saints in Christ Jesus which are in Philippi. His use of the word “saint” is not to be understood as a position in some denominational pantheon of revered persons. Nor does his use of saint refer only to the holy character and personal purity of the disciples at Philippi. A New Testament saint is a person who has been set apart from the world and sin for God and righteousness by means of faith in God and obedience to the gospel of Christ. Even the carnally minded Christians at Corinth were called saints by this same apostle, who paradoxically describes them as both “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2) and “carnal, for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions” (1 Cor. 3:3). A saint is simply a Christian, one who serves the Lord as a member of a local church of Christ.

Saints are called by God. They are summoned by God out of the darkness of sin into the kingdom of light (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). Man cannot save himself; he is utterly dependent on God for remission of sins. Therefore, God took the initiative in man’s salvation by sending Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice in payment for the sins of all men. God then sent the Holy Spirit to communicate the plan of salvation to the Bible writers. Man responds to God’s initiative with faith and obedience to this plan and then becomes the beneficiary of God’s grace in salvation. God calls all men to be saints; those who answer become saints.

Saints are called by the gospel of Jesus Christ. God uses the gospel as the summoning agent to bring the lost to salvation. Paul told the Thessalonians that God chose the gospel as the means of calling believers to salvation (2 Thess. 2:13-14). By preaching the word of God, faith is generated in the hearers who are then moved to respond to the gospel with obedience (Rom. 10:9-10, 14-17). Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44), and he went on to explain how God draws hearers to himself: “It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God; every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45).

Saints are called to be set apart for God. Christians understand that being saved from their sins requires that they strive to live *apart* from sin. They recognize that accepting salvation from God’s grace and Christ’s blood separates and sanctifies them for God’s use, and places them under obligation to keep themselves pure for him (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Saints are called to be members of the body of Christ. All Christians are members of the Lord’s church which is made up of all faithful saints in all places and times. In any given area, saints are called to be members of *a local church of Christ*. As a member of a local church, a Christian gathers with other disciples of the Lord to worship God, shares in fellowship with like-minded people, and uses his gifts in service to the Lord by edifying the saved and evangelizing the lost. The New Testament does not speak of saints at large; all faithful Christians are members of a local church, personally involved in its work and worship.

— via **The Gospel Light**

Trilacoochee Church of Christ, Trilacoochee, Florida