

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The apostle Paul addressed his letter to the church at Philippi to “*all the saints in Christ Jesus*” who were gathered there. This leads us to an important question: Just what exactly is a “saint”?
  - a. In the Roman Catholic Church, a “saint” is one of about 3,000 persons who have been so designated, many by means of a lengthy process (called “canonization”) first codified in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but modified several times since\*.

**\*The Steps of Canonization**

Here are the steps that must be followed in the process of canonization:

1. A local bishop investigates the candidate’s life and writings for evidence of heroic virtue. The information uncovered by the bishop is sent to the Vatican.
2. A panel of theologians and the cardinals of the **Congregation for Cause of Saints** evaluates the candidate’s life.
3. If the panel approves, the pope proclaims that the candidate is **venerable**, which means that the person is a role model of Catholic values.
4. The next step toward sainthood is **beatification**, which allows a person to be honored by a particular group or region. In order to beatify a candidate, it must be shown that the person is responsible for a posthumous miracle. Martyrs – those who died for their religious cause – can be beatified without evidence of a miracle. On October 20, 2003, Mother Teresa was beatified. She is now known as “Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata”.
5. In order for the candidate to be considered a saint, there must be proof of a second posthumous miracle. If there is, the person is canonized.

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- b. At the opposite end of the etymological spectrum lies the popular / secular notion of characterizing as “a saint” anyone who is a “really good person” or who has performed a singularly selfless deed.
- c. Dr. Webster, after giving a nod to the “official” type of sainthood sanctioned by the Roman Catholics, defines a “saint” as:
  - (1) “one of the spirits of the departed in heaven” or
  - (2) “one of God’s chosen and unusual Christian people”.

2. If neither the Roman Catholic or secular understandings nor the dictionary definitions of a “saint” seem satisfactory to us, it is probably because they do not reflect the meaning of “sainthood” indicated by Paul’s use of the term. He assigned “sainthood” status to every person who ever has or ever will come into an intimate spiritual relationship with God, by means of His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. In this understanding – the one embraced by historic Protestant orthodoxy – all authentic Christians have been awarded divine designation as saints. That would include all the clearly imperfect Christians in this congregation!
  
3. And it is important to note that Paul sees the entire church at Philippi as *hagios* – holy, called out, and consecrated for service to God: “sainted”, if you will. It is the church which is in Christ Jesus. Many in the church today prefer a self-oriented “personal relationship with Jesus” type of Christianity to the New Testament’s emphasis on Christ’s relationship with His entire church. Over the last 125 years or so this self-centered take on the Christian faith has swollen to produce at least three debilitating outcomes for the church:
  - a. “*Private interpretations*” (See **Jeremiah 23:25-28** and **2 Peter 1:19-21**.) of this or that understanding of a doctrinal specific which pit individual members (or small clusters of like-minded individuals) in local churches against the teaching of the pastor who does subscribe, chapter and verse, to these convictions, a situation which, left unchecked, can create discord and schism in the local body;
  - b. the resultant proliferation of Protestant denominations, many of which have themselves split again and again; and
  - c. a population explosion of agenda-driven “consumer Christians” within the Church whose primary reason for connecting with a local congregation lies in the hope of having their personal (and situational) “felt needs” met and who, driven by that desire, have created the contemporary Christian phenomenon known as “church-hopping” – moving from local church to local church in search of an imagined (and almost certainly non-existent) “perfect fit”.

There is one but legitimate reason (other than a significant change of address) to voluntarily abandon a local church: *heretical teaching*. Of course, if any member’s personal dissatisfaction with the “direction” his or her local church has taken (or refuses to take) causes them to sow seeds of discord in that local body, it becomes the duty of that church’s leadership for exhortation to either stop their divisive behaviour or, if needs be, for the sake of the health of the local body, to please leave.

4. Ah, but I digress....that is a topic for another sermon series at another time.

## LESSON

1. The status of the Christian's sainthood is acknowledged by Paul in ***Philippians 1:1-2***.
  - a. If every authentic Christians is, indeed, a *saint*, then I must humbly agree with Scripture:
    - (1) that this divine status was not earned by my own moral goodness and has certainly not been maintained by my meeting God's standard of righteousness in the years since I became a Christian;  
*Romans 3:21-28; Romans 1:17 (Habakkuk 2:4)*
    - (2) that this divine status has been given to me as a gift of the mercy and grace of God Himself, has been granted solely on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ, and has been received by me through the faith which God has also provided (the essential Christian doctrine of **justification**);  
*Romans 4:16 – 5:2; Ephesians 2:8-9*
  - b. Dear friends, this is why **humility** and **thanksgiving** are two of the key components of the Christian life and should be, as a result, among the first words other people use to describe our character.
2. The process of sainthood is the subject of Paul's intercessory prayers for his brothers and sisters at Philippi, expressed in ***Philippians 1:9-11***.
  - a. He prays that *their love will abound still more and more*. Their love for God? or their love for him? or their love for each other? **Yes!**  
*1 John 1:5-7, 2:7-11*
  - b. He prays that their love will abound *in knowledge and discernment*.
    - (1) "What Paul has in mind is not mere sentimentalism or the rush of pleasure spawned, for example, by a large conference [or 'mountain-top experience']. The kind of love Paul has in mind is the love that becomes more knowledgeable. Of course, Paul is not thinking of just any kind of knowledge. He is not hoping they will learn more and more about nuclear physics or global warming. He has in mind the knowledge of *God*; he wants them to enjoy insight into God's words and ways, and thus to know how to live and love in the light of them."  
*- D.A. Carson: Basics for Believers*
    - (2) The discernment ("*understanding*" in some texts) Paul prays for will equip the Philippian saints to choose wisely, to understand what is best, and to increase in personal holiness and corporate unity toward the ideal of blameless purity.

c. He prays that their lives will *be filled with the fruits of righteousness* (NKJV). The NLT has it as “*the fruits of your salvation*” and, Beloved, that **nails** it. Whatever these “fruits” are (and we’ll get to that directly), Paul sees both the possession and the expression of them as the normal, expected outcomes of one’s having come to God through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

3. So, what are these “*fruits of righteousness*”, these “*fruits of [the believer’s] salvation*”?

a. In his earlier letter to the Christians in Galatia, Paul calls them by another name – “*the fruit of the Spirit*” – those character qualities which are rooted in and produced by the divine partnership between the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the authentic Christian and his or her commitment to “*walking*” (living out one’s everyday life) in the Holy Spirit. That commitment, sincere as it may be, will always have to wrestle with another force present in the life of every person: their stubborn, self-centered, sinful human nature, ever ready to do battle with whatever force would dissuade it from its formerly unbridled pursuit of wish-fulfillment and selfish pleasure.

*The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict (Galatians 5:16-18).*

b. It is a mighty, on-going struggle, this battle between “flesh and Spirit”, but it is a battle which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, can and must be won, *solī Deo Gloria*. It may take time, dear friends, but, however slowly, the “old man” in each of us will give ground to the mighty power which is at work in the life of every authentic Christian, and you will bear “*the fruits of your salvation*”.

*Ref: John 15:5-8; 1 John 4:1-4*

c. Not one of these fruits is limited to any particular doctrinal understanding of the Christian faith! Each is manifested in how the believer lives the by-faith Christian life *in community*. Paul lists them (in **Galatians 5:22-23**) as:

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| (1) love                                     | (6) goodness     |
| (2) joy                                      | (7) faithfulness |
| (3) peace                                    | (8) gentleness   |
| (4) longsuffering (“ <i>patience</i> ”, NLT) | (9) self-control |
| (5) kindness                                 |                  |

d. In the same section of that letter he contrasts these “*fruits of the Spirit*” with “*the works of the flesh*”, for which he also provides a comprehensive list (5:19-21, NLT):

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| (1) sexual immorality                   | (9) outbursts of anger   |
| (2) impure thoughts                     | (10) selfish ambition  |
| (3) eagerness for lustful pleasure      | (11) divisions   |
| (4) idolatry                            | (12) the feeling that everyone is wrong<br>except for those in your little group |
| (5) participation in demonic activities | (13) envy  |
| (6) hostility                           | (14) drunkenness   |
| (7) quarreling                          | (15) wild parties  |
| (8) jealousy                            | (16) other kinds of sin  |

d. The process of sainthood – which theologians call **sanctification** – will produce a life which, over time, is characterized increasingly more by “*the fruits of the Spirit*” and decidedly less by “*the works of the flesh*”. Such a life (1) will prove to be curiously attractive to our children and our unbelieving acquaintances, (2) will produce harmony and unity in the local church, and (3) will, thereby, bring glory to God. *Amen*.