

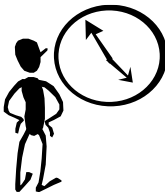
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(every other week)

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

Saints

By Webb Harris, Jr.

The Problem of Avoided Terms

It is fundamental to a proper understanding of divine revelation that we appreciate that the "popular" definitions of many words common to the Scriptures differ from the intended ideas of the inspired writers. The term "saint" is a case in point. Appearing 62 times in the King James Version of the New Testament, the word's significance is lost to the common 20th-century connotation which is foreign to the scriptural intent. The point which I wish to establish and press is that this inconsistency between original meaning and modern usage creates a problem that advances far beyond the difficulties of initial reading or comprehension. Even those Bible students with diligence enough to cut through the tangled undergrowth in order to uncover the pure etymology of the word will be fortunate to remain unspotted. The fact of the matter is this: When a Bible word is soiled by men's misunderstandings of its meaning, that word (though clearly understood by faithful students) is relegated to the station of the "defiled." There are many scriptural words and phrases which we have retired because of the way in which they are often distorted in the religious world around us. We reason that our use of these words will either, (1) cause us to be misunderstood, or (2) cause us to be classified with those individuals who have monopolized the term in question.

Examples of the above practice are numerous. Many Christians shy away from using "Holy Spirit" in their speech and prayers for fear that their meaning or their person might be misconstrued as Pentecostal. This is true with the term "saint." We are painfully aware that when most people hear the word "saint," their mental image is a far cry from what we mean to convey. So it is easier, and often the wiser, to use a more familiar parallel word.

There is a price to be paid for retiring scriptural words for whatever reason. This consequence might be more visible in

an illustration. Imagine that a congregation studies its way through the New Testament once per year. They do so in a book-by-book fashion. However, they habitually omit the book of Acts (or Romans or Hebrews). Now many of the truths that they are continually passing over will be supplied somewhat by similar passages in other books. But, suffice it to say, they are subjecting themselves to vital deficiencies. God included Acts (or Romans or Hebrews) in the New Testament for a reason.

One word may seem far more insignificant than a whole book; nonetheless, that word has a meaning and that particular meaning is inherent in no other word. We might, for whatever reason, choose to use "body of Christ" instead of "household of God" whenever we speak of the church. After all, they're the same thing, aren't they? And don't "redemption" and "propitiation" both speak of what Christ was doing on the cross of Calvary? Aren't they interchangeable? In reality, it would be a tragedy to eliminate "household of God" and "propitiation" from our meditations and communications because these words convey concepts that are not adequately represented by other similar terms.

The same is true for "Christian" and "saint." We might try to substitute the former for the latter because the latter is so often misunderstood. After all, a saint is a Christian and a Christian is a saint. Basically, anyway. But, oh, what we forfeit when we throw away this divinely-inspired designation of God's people.

A Closer Look at the Word "Saint"

The World Book Encyclopedia's offering on "saint" illustrates boldly the modern understanding of the word. It suggests that a saint is a "holy person who becomes a religious hero by exemplifying a virtue . . . of his . . . religion. Many persons achieve sainthood because they played a major role in the history of their religion . . . ("St. Paul" is offered as an example -- wch) [Others] are revered as saints because before or after death they performed miracles." The same reference materials report that the Roman Catholic Church presently sanctions 58 international feast days in memory of 58 Roman Catholic saints. It further states that to "achieve sainthood" one must be nominated after one's death, be beatified by the church after a close examination of one's life and works, and be associated with at least two miracles.

Most people's understanding of the term "saint" is summed up in the above paragraph. Their conception might be illustrated by a tiny circle inside a larger circle which is itself inside an enormous circle. The enormous circle represents all the people of the world. The circle inside the enormous circle represents all the people of the church or all good people. The tiny circle represents a special, elite class of good people: saints. It is not uncommon for people to treasure relics associated with this elite class, attributing magical powers to the relics; prayers to these "saints" are quite ordinary.

As mentioned earlier, the word "saint" appears frequently in the New Testament, However, the above understanding of the word is foreign to its New Testament meaning. Rather than signifying an elite class of special disciples within the church, or a selection of dead Christians officially "sainted" by church leaders, the word is a designation of all Christians. Paul addresses his epistles to the saints in any given locality (Romans 1:7; II Corinthi-

ans 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2). When Paul persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem, he was said to have done harm "to the saints" (Acts 9:13). And when Peter visited the Christians of Lydda, he was said to have "come down also to the saints who lived [there]." To observe its use throughout the New Testament is to see it clearly as a designation of all Christians. But this is not to suggest that "saint" and "Christian" have equivalent definitions. This is why it is harmful to utilize one word to the exclusion of the other.

The term "Christian" denotes a connection with Christ. Though scholars may disagree on just what kind of connection is implied (some say the word means "followers of Christ," some say the word means "little Christ," etc.), the term speaks of a person who is linked with Jesus. The term "saint" applies to the same individual but tells us something different about him. The term "saint" tells us that this individual is "holy." Indeed, the Greek word which is translated as "saint" in our Bibles is *hagios*, which means holy. The NASB bears this out by continuously footnoting "saints" with "holy ones." The Latin word for "holy" is *sanctus* and this is where our word "saint" comes from. It is also apparent that our term "sanctify" comes from the same Latin word. Verily, to speak of something as being "sanctified" is in essence to speak of it as being "made holy." (See this connection in I Corinthians 1:2.)

What does it mean to "sanctify" or "make holy?" The pat answer is "to set apart." This seems to be as good a definition as any, however, it might be useful to elongate this definition to include that the "sanctified" object is set apart for special use. When tabernacle utensils were "sanctified" in the Mosaic system, they were being set apart for special use (i.e., they were not to be utilized for common, or "profane," purposes; they were off-limits for anything but their designated aim). In this way, they were "holy." If, then, the Scriptures tell us that a certain individual has become "holy," what does that tell us about the said person? He has been set apart for special use.

Our Identity as Christians

I believe that many Christians have lost a part of their identity. Particularly, the "saint" part. It is one thing to technically understand the original intent of the term; it is another matter entirely to practically apply its force to oneself. To live up to such a designation would demand that we "*cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*" (II Corinthians 7:1).

If one tiptoes around the concept of "saintliness" long enough, he will come to envision it a little differently than the majority. Though he long ago learned the true derivation of "saint" and in theory recognizes that it ought to be applied to all children of God, he still thinks in terms of "ordinary Christians" and the "elite." He does not apply God's call to total separateness to himself. He does not see himself as an instrument set apart for God's special use; an instrument not to be subjected to the profane. He feels that it is acceptable for him to be a little less righteous than those church members who have committed themselves to a Christianity of heroic, "saintly" proportions. It would be unseemly for them to lose their temper, get a little tipsy, and swear mildly, but not so for himself. He knows his limits.

Somehow we have got to blaze our way past the World Book concept of "sainthood," the Roman Catholic doctrine, and the common mindset. This will mean ignoring the suggestions of numerous Bible publishers who insist that Luke's record of Christ's work is the gospel according to "Saint Luke." It is quite certain that Luke was a saint, but he was no more a saint than you or me. But, friends, it's so easy, is it not, to think of men like Luke as being in a "cream of the crop" corps of disciples that was over and above our humble heads.

All in all, what I am trying to say is that there is, indeed, a higher "code of conduct" worthy only of "holy" people. The twist is that if I am a Christian, I am one of those "holy" people and I need to begin living like a person whom God has set apart from the profane to be utilized for his purposes according to his blessed will. Paul wrote to the Christians of Rome, *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in a manner worthy of the saints."* There is a certain way that "holy" people would receive this woman; my brethren, you must live up to this station.

In Ephesians 5:3, Paul writes, *"but do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints."* There is a special way that "holy" people conduct themselves; my brethren, you must submit yourselves to this degree. Why? Because, through Christ our Lord, you are saints. That is the truth that we must grasp.

On Offending Others

By Jefferson David Tant

Did you ever offend someone? Have you ever been offended? I am quite sure we can all answer "Yes" to both of those questions. And while it should never be our intent to offend others, we know it does happen. Sometimes it is done unintentionally, while there are times when we do intend to offend.

Paul dealt with the matter of offending others with respect to eating meat that had been used as a sacrifice to idols.

"But if anyone says to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved" (I Corinthians 10:28-33).

Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to be mindful of others who may not have the same knowledge they have that meat is just meat, whether it has been used in a sacrifice to idols or not.

So, while it should never be our intent to offend others, we must also recognize that truth does sometimes offend, and we should not sacrifice truth to keep from offending others.

We know that many were offended by Christ when he came into his hometown and was performing miracles. *"And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household'"* (Matthew 13:57).

The truth is, the truth will offend at times, even if that is not our intent. *"Just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed'"* (Romans 9:33).

We would suppose that Stephen offended the Jews when they stoned him to death. Note some of his words to them: *"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him"* (Acts 7:51-54).

We could cite other passages about Peter and Paul and other disciples who were imprisoned, beaten, and put to death. And why? Because they dared to speak the truth. Because some were offended by their message.

So, what about today? Has the truth changed? Has Satan's influence changed? Are men's hearts any different than in the first century? Do we need to soften the message so as not to offend?

Obviously, the answer is "No" to each of the questions.

Yes, we need to be careful about our attitude and the use of our words, but we cannot muzzle the truth in order not to offend.

Have I ever offended anyone with regard to spiritual matters? I suppose I have, although that was not my intention. In seeking to have a Bible study with a neighbor when we lived in New Mexico, I went to this young Baptist minister's home across the street. He was not home, and his wife said she would tell him what I wanted when he came home. Sure enough, in time he came to see me. He said his wife told him what I wanted, but he was not interested. Before he left, I asked him one question. "You believe that we are saved by faith only, don't you?" He replied that he did. I opened my Bible to James 2:24 and asked him to read it. *"You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."*

He seemed offended. He closed the Bible shut, admitted he had never read that passage, and walked away. That was the end of our conversation and the end of any neighborly association. I was sorry that the truth seemed to offend him, but that's what truth does at times.

Obviously, not everyone receives a correction or rebuke with a good attitude, but it must be done for the saving of the soul. Paul advised Timothy to *"preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction"* (II Timothy 4:2).

So, whether preaching, teaching a class, or simply having a discussion, let us use our words wisely, but let us not soften the truth for fear of offending the listener.