

Titles of Christians (9)

Saints

1 Corinthians 1:1 – 2

Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Today we are going to study another title of Christians:

RSV **1 Corinthians 1:1 – 2** Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,² To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: (1Co 1:1 – 2 RSV)

This passage comes from a letter that Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. In verse 2 he says the brothers and sisters of the church are those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and they are called to be saints.

Christians are called saints, the holy ones

Most people think that only outstanding Christians who have accomplished a lot for Yahweh God are called saints, and that ordinary Christians are not saints. But here apostle Paul says all the brethren in the church who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus are called saints!

Indeed according to the New Testament all true Christians are called saints! Let's look at some passages in the New Testament to confirm this point:

NASB **Romans 1:7** to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as saints*: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 1:7 NASB)

It says that all who are beloved of God in Rome are called saints!

NASB **Ephesians 1:1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:1 NASB)

It says that saints are those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. The only requirement for being a saint is to be faithful in Christ Jesus!

NASB **Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons (Phi 1:1 NASB)

It says here that all the brethren in Philippi are saints.

Through these passages we see that Christians are called saints in Christ Jesus.

What does “saint” mean?

But what does “saint” mean? What is the meaning of the term “saint”?

The original Greek word for “saint” is ἅγιος (*hagios*). According to Greek-English dictionaries, the word *hagios* means holy, dedicated to God. Therefore the *saints* are simply the holy ones.

What does it mean to be holy?

But what does it mean to be holy? People often think that holy means having no sin; but that is an extended meaning of *holy*. The basic concept of holy originates from the Old Testament.

1. The basic concept of holy

NASB **Leviticus 20:26** ‘Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine. (Lev 20:26 NASB)

The word “LORD” in all capital letters stands for the proper name of Yahweh God. Here Yahweh God says that the people of Israel have to be holy to Him, because He is holy, and He has set them apart from the other people to be His.

NASB **Deuteronomy 7:6** For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deu 7:6 NASB)

This passage Deuteronomy 7:6 says that Yahweh God has chosen the people of Israel to be a people for His own possession, they are a holy people to Him.

NASB **Leviticus 23:3** ‘For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings. (Lev 23:3 NASB)

Here this passage Leviticus 23:3 says that the seventh day is to be a sabbath, which means a day of complete rest. On the sabbath day the Israelites are to have a holy meeting, they are not to do any work at all; the sabbath is a day to Yahweh God. Here “holy” is linked to the concept that something is reserved for Yahweh God.

NASB **Leviticus 27:30** ‘Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’S; it is holy to the LORD. (Lev 27:30 NASB)

This passage Leviticus 27:30 says that one tenth of all produce, including the seed of the land or the fruit of the tree, belongs to Yahweh God; the Israelites are to give them to God, these are holy to Him.

These 4 passages above show that whatever is separated to Yahweh God is holy to Him. Holy means to be separated to Yahweh God, that is the basic concept of holy.

2. The secondary concept of holy

But there is a secondary concept of holy.

RSV **Hebrews 7:25 – 26** Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.²⁶ For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. (Heb 7:25 – 26 RSV)

The word “he” in this passage refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Here it says that the Lord Jesus can save all the people who come to God through him. The Lord Jesus is holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners; this is the secondary concept of holy.

The basic concept of holy is separated to Yahweh God. This basic concept leads to the secondary concept of holy, that is blameless, unstained.

NASB **Leviticus 10:10** and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, (Lev 10:10 NASB)

This passage says that the Israelites are to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, between the clean and the unclean. Here holy is the opposite of profane, just as clean is the opposite of unclean.

NASB **Isaiah 5:16** But the LORD of hosts will be exalted in judgment, And the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness. (Isa 5:16 NASB)

Here it says that Yahweh God will show Himself holy in righteousness; so holy is linked to righteousness.

From this passage we see that the secondary concept of holiness is righteousness. It means that if you want to be holy, you have to pursue righteousness (I have talked about righteousness in my sermon “Righteousness in the Holy Spirit”; please refer to that sermon on our YouTube channel @CDC_Online. I will not repeat the meaning of righteousness here).

Now when we sum up all the passages above, we see that:

- The basic concept of holy is to be separated to Yahweh God.
- The secondary (or extended) concept of holy is righteousness.

Christians are the saints of Yahweh God, so we have to separate ourselves to Yahweh God. And because God is righteous, therefore we have to be righteous, we have to live a righteous life.

Does it mean that we have to stay away from sinners?

Thus holy means to be separated to God. Even the Lord Jesus likewise says that his disciples don't belong to the world, because he has chosen them out of the world.

NASB **John 15:19** “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. (Joh 15:19 NASB)

So does it mean that Christians have to stay away from sinners? The answer is definitely NO, because the Lord Jesus never stays away from sinners; on the contrary the Lord eats with the tax-collectors; the Lord forgives an adulterous woman, teaching her to sin no more; the Lord touches a leper etc. And the Lord came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

NASB **Matthew 9:12 – 13** But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.¹³ “But go and learn what *this* means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mat 9:12-13 NASB)

We see that the Lord Jesus comes near to sinners because he wants to save them. Even though the Lord comes near to sinners, his holiness is not affected at all. On the contrary, it is in the midst of sinners that the holiness of the Lord shines more brightly; and his holiness defeats their sins.

NASB **Matthew 4:13 – 17** and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.¹⁴ *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a light dawned.” ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Mat 4:13-17 NASB)

Here this passage says that the Lord Jesus came to Zebulun and Naphtali, and he began to preach about repentance. Please take notice here, Zebulon and Naphtali were located in the land of Gentiles (in verse 15), with people living in darkness (in verse 16). The Lord went to the land of Gentiles to start preaching to the people living in darkness, his holiness was like a great light shining in the shadow of death.

Therefore we don't have to run away from sinners. Indeed if we want to save them we have to go near them; But we don't live the kind of life they live, we live a life of righteousness. Even though we live among the sinners, our righteousness would separate us from them, and our righteousness would shine like a great light in the shadow of death.

Illustration 1: Many years ago a Christian missionary who came to our church gave a sharing about going into the red light district in a certain city in Asia. He saw with his own eyes that some prostitutes were as young as eleven, twelve year old girls. These girls even tried to seduce him, but his righteousness overcame their sinful behavior. He looked at them with compassion, and felt pain in his heart. When the Lord Jesus looked at the sins in this world, his heart would definitely be very painful too, but he didn't stay away from sinners. Instead he drew them to himself; his holiness defeated their sins and he saved them.

Illustration 2: There was a British Protestant Christian charismatic missionary called Sister 'Jackie' Pullinger, who went to Hong Kong in 1966. She worked as a primary school teacher in the Kowloon Walled City, which was one of the world's largest opium producing centers, run by Chinese criminal Triad gangs. She reached out to the Triad gang members. Later she established a youth center inside the walled city to help drug addicts and people sleeping on the streets. Today she still lives in Hong Kong after she had retired due to old age.

The importance of holiness

After you listen to all these, do you want to be saints? We all want to be saved, we all want to become children of God, we all want to be free from sin, but do you want to pursue holiness?

^{ESV} **Romans 6:22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. (Rom 6:22 ESV)

Here it says when we become slaves of God, we submit to God's authority, we obey Him absolutely, then we will get sanctification, which means we acquire holiness, and at the end we will have eternal life in the future. Slaves of God is the same as slaves of righteousness, please refer to my sermon "Slaves of Righteousness"; I will not repeat the whole thing here.

This passage shows that we first become slaves of God, then we will have holiness (or sanctification), and finally eternal life. We simply cannot bypass slaves of God and holiness to get to eternal life. On the contrary if we are not slaves of God, we won't have holiness, then we won't have eternal life in the future, which means we won't be saved!

^{NKJ} **Hebrews 12:14** Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: (Heb 12:14 NKJ)

This passage declares the importance of holiness, for without holiness, no one will see the Lord! If we don't see the Lord, then we don't have salvation!

So we see how important holiness is; how then can we have holiness? In other words, how can we become holy?

How can we become holy?

^{ESV} **Acts 26:18** to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Act 26:18 ESV)

This passage is the word of the Lord Jesus telling Paul to go preach to the Gentiles; it says that Paul will open the eyes of the Gentiles so that they would turn from darkness to light and turn from the power of Satan to God; then they will receive the forgiveness of sins, and will be sanctified by their faith in the Lord.

To be sanctified simply means to be holy. It means that when we have faith in the Lord Jesus we will become holy.

^{ESV} **John 17:17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (Joh 17:17 ESV)

This passage is the prayer of the Lord Jesus to his Father Yahweh God; he was asking his Father to sanctify his disciples, which means to make them holy. And how to make them holy? In truth, the word of God.

These two passages Acts 26:18 and John 17:17 show that when we have faith in the Lord Jesus and live according to the word of God, we will be sanctified, which means we will become holy.

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything we have just studied:

- Christians are saints, we have to live a life of holiness.
- The basic concept of holy is to be separated to Yahweh God; but it doesn't mean that Christians have to stay away from sinners.
- The secondary concept (or extended concept) of holy is righteousness.
- Without holiness, no one will see Yahweh God, that is how important holiness is.
- We are sanctified by our faith in God and by the word of truth.