

Sunday, December 8, 2019—Colossians 1:2 Are We Saints?

Introduction

- After three weeks of introduction, two Sundays ago we began our exposition of Colossians by looking at Paul’s Unique Apostleship in Colossians 1:1.
- This morning I want to begin looking at Colossians 1:2 by considering at an important question, Are we Saints?
- The question of sainthood has perplexed many over the years and is worthy of our consideration this morning. There are many different views on the subject.
 - *Roman Catholic View*—“saints” are those canonized by the Catholic Church. On this view one must qualify for sainthood by meeting certain criteria. Those who meet the criteria are declared “saints” via an official church action after they are dead.
 - *Piety View*—maintains that it is not proper to call anyone a “saint” today given that we all still struggle with the flesh and therefore sin this side of eternity.
 - *All Believers are Saints*—“. . . scripturally speaking, the “saints” are the body of Christ, Christians, the church. All Christians are considered saints. All Christians are saints—and at the same time are called to be saints.” (Gotquestions.org)
 - *Jewish Believers Living in the Kingdom Era*—this view maintains the word “saints” in the New Testament refers primarily to Jewish believers living in the “kingdom era” beginning at Pentecost and stretching until 70 AD. According to this line of reasoning, there are no “saints” alive today and have not been since the offer of the kingdom offer was withdrawn in 70 AD. ([Who Are the Saints?](#))
- As a Bible Believing Pauline Dispensationalist who is not a Roman Catholic, I reject the Roman Catholic View outright as having no scriptural foundation. Likewise, the Piety View, which is informed by the Roman Catholic View, if sainthood were determined by one’s actions here on earth then none of us would have any shot of being “saints.”
- I have been preaching the rightly divided Pauline Grace Message for nearly 20 years and only recently encountered the view that “saints” are Jewish Believers Living in the Kingdom Era as defined by the fourth view. This does not automatically make it wrong given that appeals to authority, such as I have been teaching for 20 years and never heard of this before, are not legitimate arguments. Given that this view has arisen from within the camp of Pauline Dispensationalism and offers the greatest challenge to the notion that all members of the body of Christ are “saints” it is incumbent upon us to consider the relative merits of the position.

- It is true that sometimes the word “saints” refers to kingdom saints or members of the Little Flock i.e., Jewish believers possessing a kingdom hope.
 - Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10—many of these occurrences are in the context of the collection for the poor “saints” in Jerusalem.
 - Romans 15:25-26
 - I Corinthians 16:1
- From these scriptures we can understand that sometimes the word “saints” is used to refer to Jewish believers possessing a kingdom hope. This of course means that the standard Evangelical answer given by GotQuestions.org is not an entirely correct answer because it is not a rightly divided answer. Many of the verses used in the GotQuestions.org article to prove that all believers are “saints” aren’t referring to members of the body of Christ but members of the Little Flock possessing a kingdom hope.
- That said, does it follow logically and more importantly scripturally to say based upon the verses noted above, among others, that there are no “saints” alive today or that current members of the body of Christ are not “saints?” In my opinion, it is illogical to say that because certain occurrences of the word “saints” are clearly referring to Jewish believers that therefore the remaining occurrences must be Jewish believers as well. Arguing in the manner is in danger of committing the error of reasoning known as *non sequitur*:
 - “An inference or a conclusion not logically following from the premises; a response, remark, etc., that does not logically follow from what has gone before.” (*Oxford English Dictionary*)
- We need to let the context determine who is being referred to each time we encounter the word “saints” in the New Testament not a set of arbitrary assumptions. Just because GotQuestions.org got something wrong does not mean we need to over correct in the opposite direction. Our goal is to rightly divide the word of truth i.e., divide in the correct amount by not over dividing or under dividing.
- Moreover, this is not an irrelevant or impractical question because how one answers it will impact what they believe about who Paul is speaking to later in Colossians 1 as well as throughout the rest of the Pauline epistles.
 - Colossians 1:4, 12, 26
- Let me say at the outset that adequacy addressing this subject matter is going to require more than one study. This morning my goal is to set forth the basic presuppositions of the Jewish Believers view as well as deal with the textual facts related to the use of the word “saints” in the New Testament.

Jewish Believers Living in the Kingdom Era

- The chief assumption of the view under consideration is that the English word “saints” is an anachronism. In support of this notion assertions are made regarding John Wycliffe and the history of the English word “saints” that I find to be incorrect. These assertions include:
 - 1) The word "Saint" didn't come until the 1300s.
 - 2) From the beginning of the word of God in English the word "saint" meant someone canonized by the Catholic Church.
 - 3) When the word started in English it meant something not in the pages of scripture.
 - 4) In the 13 and 1400s when the English Bible was being written [by Wycliffe] the Catholic concept was put into the pages of the NT. and we have never really gotten past this.
- So, the chief assumption of this view is that Wycliffe wrote the Roman Catholic understanding of "saints" into the English Bible when it was first put together in the 1300s. Is this correct?
- Matthew 27:52—is where we find the first occurrence of the word “saints” in the New Testament. Wycliffe rendered the verse as following in Middle English:
 - "and many bodies of seyntis (“saints”) that hadden slepte, rysen vp."
- When Wycliffe used the word "seyntis" (“saints”) was he referring to the canonized “saints” of a church that didn't even exist at the time of Christ's crucifixion? If so, this truly would have been anachronistic.
- The notion that Wycliffe wrote the Roman Catholic understanding of "saints" into the English Bible when it was first put together in the 1300s is simply not true. Wycliffe clearly used the term "seyntis" (“saints”) to refer to holy ones or *hagios* (Greek). He is not talking about those canonized by the Catholic Church.
- In verses where the King James currently reads “saints” Wycliffe used the terms "hooli men" (holy men) or "hooli" (holy) 19 times. In at least 2 passages the terms "seyntis" and "hooli men" are used interchangeably in the same context. Consider the following example from I Cor. 6:1-2:
 - I Corinthians 6:1—Dar any of you that hath a cause ayens another, be demed at wickid men, and not at hooli men (“holy men”)?
 - I Corinthians 6:2—Whether ye witen not, that seyntis (“saints”) schulen deme of this world? And if the world schal be demed bi you, be ye vnworthi to deme of the leste thingis?
- Therefore, I find the chief assumption of this view to be entirely without foundation. Secondary assumptions are also offered in support.

- The kingdom era as a time in which God was offering the kingdom to the Jewish nation ending in 70 AD.
- Saints are Jewish believers living in a kingdom era who can receive the kingdom.
 - A Jewish believer today is not a saint. They cannot receive the kingdom.
 - There are no saints today and haven't been since 70 AD.
 - Makes for a complicated definition of a saint. WOULDN'T HAVE TO GIVE SUCH A DEFINITION OF THE WORD SAINT HAD IT NOT BEEN INSERTED INTO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. AND CONFUSED EVERYONE.
- The chief assumption regarding Wycliffe writing the Roman Catholic use of the word "saints" into the English Bible has a cascade effect upon the rest of this view's assumptions.

Textual Facts

- Colossians 1:2—Paul addressed the book of Colossians to the "saints and faithful brethren in Christ." The English word "saints" is a translation of the Greek word *hagios* which essentially means "holy." In the King James Bible *hagios* is translated as holy (161x), saints (61x), Holy One (4x), miscellaneous (3x).
 - The following are described in the New Testament as being *hagios* or holy.
 - Matt. 1:18—Holy Ghost
 - Matt. 4:5—Holy City
 - Matt. 24:15—Holy Place
 - Matt. 25:31—Holy Angles
 - Luke 1:35—Holy Thing
 - Luke 1:70—Holy Prophets
 - Luke 1:72—Holy Covenant
 - Luke 11:13—Holy Spirit
 - Acts 4:27—Holy Child Jesus
 - Rom. 1:2—Holy Scriptures
 - Rom. 16:16—Holy Kiss
 - Eph. 2:21—Holy Apostles
 - I Thess. 5:27—Holy Brethren
 - I Peter 2:5—Holy Priesthood
 - I Peter 2:9—Holy Nation
 - II Peter 1:18—Holy Mount
 - II Peter 2:21—Holy Commandment
 - II Peter 3:11—Holy Conversation
- 61 times the adjective *hagios* is translated as "saints" in the King James Bible. This is the most common adjective used when the Bible is speaking to or about a group of "holy" people. This

makes sense given that the based definition of the English word “saints” means “holy.” Note that this is exactly how Wycliffe used the word.

- The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following base definition for the adjective “saints:
 - A. adj. = holy adj. and n., in various special applications.
- So, the word “saint” is an adjective used to describe a holy person. Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* defines a “saint” as:
 - “A person sanctified; a holy or godly person;”
- Colossians 1:2—Paul uses the word “saints” to describe those who are “in Christ.”
- Ephesians 1:1, 3-4—one of the spiritual blessings that God has blessed the body of Christ with is that we should be “holy and without blame before him in love.”
- I Corinthians 1:2—according to this verse, all believers at Corinth were "sanctified in Christ Jesus" or *hagiazō*. If so, how are all believers not "saints" (*hagios*) or holy ones in the same verse? If a believer is “sanctified” and set apart unto Christ how are they not a "saint" i.e., holy? This is exactly what the word “saints” means, according to Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* (See above).
- How are all those who have been *hagiazō*(ed) (“sanctified”) not *hagios* or holy i.e., “saints” as a result? Maintaining the position that only Jewish believers living during the kingdom era were *hagiazō*(ed) or “sanctified” and are therefore “saints” is out of step with the rest of Paul’s epistles?
- Romans 15:16—“That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being **sanctified** [*hagiazō*] by the Holy Ghost.”
 - Paul was a minister of Jesus Christ among the Gentiles that they might be “sanctified by the Holy Ghost.” So, were Gentile believers *hagiazō*(ed) or “sanctified” through Paul’s ministry among them? Yes. How then could the gentiles have not been *hagios*, holy ones, or “saints” by virtue of the fact that they had been *hagiazō*(ed)? How can one be the past tense form of the verb “sanctified” (*hagiazō*) and not be in the present what the verb accomplished i.e., *hagios*, holy, or a “saint?” This makes no sense at all.
- Consider that Romans 15:16 was written before 70 AD during the “kingdom era” identified by the view we are critiquing. Yet, Paul desired and ministered during this exact time period to the end that the gentiles might be “sanctified by the Holy Ghost.” Therefore, all the gentiles who believed Paul’s gospel during this time period were “sanctified” (*hagiazō*) and therefore became

“saints” (*hagios*) or holy in Christ Jesus a reality that does not cohere with the assumptions of the view under consideration.

- Romans 1:5—Paul apostleship extended to “all nations” this included both Jews and Gentiles alike.
- Romans 1:7—Paul is writing to “all that be at Rome” would this not have included those from “all nations” from verse 5. “All that be at Rome” both Jews and Gentiles are “called to be saints.”
 - Romans 1:13—Paul was seeking fruit among the gentiles at Rome and is calling them to be “saints.”
- Colossians 1:2—all who are in Christ are “saints” i.e., “holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph. 1:4). All members of the body of Christ are “saints” today by virtue of the fact that they have been “sanctified in Christ Jesus.”
 - I Thessalonians 5:27—calling each other “saints” is not normal English parlance. That said, believers customarily will refer to each other as brother or sister so and so.
 - Philippians 4:21
- Sometimes the New Testament uses the word “saints” to refer to Jewish believers, but it would be a mistake in both logic and scriptural exposition to automatically assume that because a certain number of references clearly refer to Jewish believers that all the rest must do likewise. The word “saints” in the New Testament is used to refer to any of the following: 1) Jewish kingdom saints, 2) members of the body of Christ, and 3) angelic beings (Jude 14). The context determines the application and meaning in each case, not a series of arbitrary assumptions.
- In our next study, we will consider the practical implications of all of this as we continue our exposition of Colossians.