

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SAINTS

WE HAVE ALREADY EXAMINED the worship of images and relics, justified by the Church of Rome on the ground that the adoration presented is directed not toward the visible objects but to the personalities they represent. We have found this plea to be false, and the worship to be idolatrous and offensive to God. We now go a step further to see if the worship of saints in Heaven, independent of any visible representation, is permissible.

As a first step we need to be clear about our terminology, for a saint in the New Testament sense of the word is something entirely different from a Roman Catholic saint.

The word “**saint**” means *separate, set apart*. They had testament, never as the prefix to a name, but always with reference to ordinary believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are alive, living on the earth, when the name is given to them. If we look at some of the passages referring to them, we shall find that they were living in various cities and countries: Jerusalem (Acts 9:13); Rome (Romans 1:7); Lydda (Acts 9:32); Joppa (Acts 9: 41); Corinth (I Corinthians 1:2); Achaia (II Corinthians 1:1); Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1); Philippi (Philippians 1:1) ; and Colosse (Col. 1:2) ; as members of the churches in all these places, and of course in many places besides these which are specifically mentioned.

They had been sinners like the rest,

- They had been washed and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God (I Corinthians 6:11).
- They had been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus, and all their sins had been forgiven according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).
- They had been accepted in God's well-beloved Son (Ephesians 1:6).
- They were in Christ (Ephesians 1:1).
- In Christ they who once were far off had been made nigh (Ephesians 2:13).

So near, so very near to God —
Nearer I could not be—
For in the person of His Son
I am as near as He.

Yet they were not perfect in themselves. The two letters to the Corinthian church reveal that these saints sometimes had grievous defects, falling far short of the sainthood or separateness from sin to which they had been called.

There were divisions among them, lawsuits, disorderly worship, and one case even of shocking immorality with which the church had to deal. Most of the other churches were better than this, but none were “**perfect,**” so God gave gifts to His Church “**for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry**” (Ephesians 4:12).

According to the teaching of the New Testament, saints are not a special class of Christians who, having attained to what Rome calls a “*heroic condition of holiness,*” form a sort of spiritual aristocracy in Heaven, enrolled in a special catalog by papal authority, who must be “venerated” and invoked in prayer.

Far different from the New Testament concept is Roman Catholic sainthood. Their saints consist only of those who have already died, and are living in Heaven. Their saint in its meaning of separation is an anomaly, since in Heaven there is no sin from which to be separated. Roman Catholic sainthood follows beatification or canonization. Beatification is a decree where veneration is permitted in certain areas. Canonization is worldwide in its application, and the veneration is obligatory. For several centuries, bishops decided who was a saint. Then for another long period the power of decision became a prerogative of archbishops, until at the end of the eleventh century the pope alone could beatify or canonize, and then only after careful scrutiny of the records of the life and sanctity of the one so to be honored. This was generally done long after the person concerned had passed away.

As a last stage, in 1634 regulations for canonization were officially promulgated. Both beatification and canonization demanded the expenditure of very large sums of money for all the procedure to be followed. For canonization it was necessary for the one under consideration to have performed at least four authenticated miracles.

The highest of the saints is the Virgin Mary, to whom a degree of veneration or worship is accorded superior to all others. Then follow the apostles; next evangelists of the first three centuries who suffered martyrdom— among them John the Baptist, though the Bible says of him, “**John did no miracle**” (John 10:41).

After these, the number increases rapidly, including all sorts of men and women, recluses, theologians, prelates, popes, kings, and humble folk to whom particular days were assigned in the calendar when they were specially invoked—until an All Saints' Day was provided for those who could not find a place elsewhere. The great majority of those inscribed in the Catalog of Saints are celibate, with married people in a small minority, Rome's idea of sanctity not always coinciding with New Testament standards. We need not be concerned about deciding who among the Roman Catholic saints in the Catalog are true New Testament saints, for the Word of God tells us:

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God (I Corinthians 4:5).

That command applies to us as it does also to the pope. But one thing is certain—every Roman Catholic “saint” who is really in Heaven today is there, not because of his own heroic sanctity, nor by papal judicial decision and proclamation, but because like us he has trusted in Christ as his own Saviour, and has been washed in His precious blood. They are found in Him, not having their own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith (Philippians 3:9).

Rome says that the intercession of her saints on our behalf has special efficacy because they are nearer to God than ordinary Christian people. But that is not true.

Every true believer is a saint, and he is in Christ, as we have already seen. He is in Christ as the members are in the body. He is in Christ as the branches are in the vine, part of the vine, so that the vine would not be complete without them. And Jesus said, **I am the vine, ye are the branches** (John 15:5).

What do the Scriptures have to say about praying to those who have departed this life?

1. Prayer is a form of worship. The command of God, reiterated by our Lord Jesus Christ is, **“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”**
2. The worship of saints, or prayer to them is nowhere commanded in Scripture.
3. There is no single instance of invocation of the saints, in either the Old or New Testaments.
4. Neither Peter with Cornelius (Acts 10:25), nor Paul and Barnabas with the people of Lystra (Acts 14:15), would allow these men to bow down to them.

It is different with the Lord Jesus Christ. The leper worshiped and prayed to Him (Matthew 8:2). So did Jairus (Matthew 9:18), and the disciples after the storm on the lake (Matthew 14:33), and the Canaanitish woman (Matthew 15:22). He received their worship and answered their prayers.

If Peter and Paul and Barnabas would not receive worship on earth, why should they do so now in Heaven?

5. Concerning believers, Paul says, they are those who **“in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”** (I Corinthians 1:2). He does not refer to them as “those who call upon Mary or the saints.”

6. It is useless to pray to the saints.

a. Departed saints are neither omnipresent nor omniscient, to hear men's prayers everywhere. To pray to them is to ascribe to them attributes which belong to God alone, and it discounts the value and necessity of prayer to God Himself.

b. There is no evidence that the saints have power to help, even if they could hear and know our needs.

c. Our Lord only once referred to prayer to a saint in Paradise, but that prayer came not from earth, but from Hades: Dives prayed to Abraham, first for himself and then for his brethren still on earth, but both prayers were rejected (Luke 16:23-31).

d. After Samuel's death, Saul sought his help, because God had not answered.

Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and inquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him (I Chronicles 10: 13, 14).

To invoke the dead is not only useless, it is sin.

7. We do not need the prayers of the saints, even if they were available.

a. To seek their help is to imply that Christ is unwilling to save and bless men, and needs to be persuaded. It is derogatory to His love and grace.

b. The name of Jesus is the only plea we need before God. Jesus is the all-prevailing name.

c. Peter (Acts 2:21) and Paul (Romans 10:13) both said, “**Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.**”

d. The ministry of Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is all-sufficient.

For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

e. Jesus Himself excluded every other mediator.

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

Rome's Catalog of Saints may have an antiquarian interest here on earth, but there is not a shred of evidence that it has the least validity in Heaven. There is nothing in the Scriptures to support the idea of a group of specially holy souls having an access to God beyond what every believer enjoys. There is nothing to suggest that they can either hear our prayers or help us by their intercession. Attempted contact with them is forbidden. Since we have Christ as our High Priest, always interceding on our behalf, both willing and able to come to our relief, we need no other mediator.

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us (II Corinthians 1:20).

Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us (Psalm 62:8).

O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come (Psalm 65:2).

In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6, 7).

~ end of chapter 29 ~

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