

## New Testament Saints

This past Sunday a newscast declared that two men and a woman who in life had been members of the Catholic church had been declared saints. Notice the phrase, "who in life had been..." Each of these individuals has been dead for more than 80 years. That they are just now being declared "saints" is in full accord with the Catholic doctrine of how one attains sainthood. At the same time it is a demonstration of how distant Catholicism is from the Divinely-inspired New Testament. The various levels through which one must go and the achievements that he or she must reach in order to become a saint in Catholicism as well as the rarity with which these appointments supposedly occur in that organization are aspects of becoming a saint that are wholly foreign to what the New Testament teaches.

Becoming a saint according to the New Testament is simple. Obey the Gospel. There are many great blessings that occur in the life of an individual when he or she obeys the Gospel. Having heard the Word of God (Romans 10:17), believed on Jesus as the Christ (John 8:24), repented of sins (Luke 13:3), confessed faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10) and been immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:6), a man or woman at that moment is forgiven of sins (Acts 2:38), added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47), delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). There are several more terms that describe what occurs when a person obeys the Gospel, but consider this next one as it relates to the context of this article. In I Corinthians 6:11, Paul reminded Corinthian Christians, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The word "sanctified" means, "to separate, to purify, to make holy." It is from a Greek root word that is translated "holy" 161 times in the New Testament. It is also translated "saints" a total of 61 times therein. "Sanctified" in I Corinthians 6:11 is in the aorist tense which means it was something that was done one time in the past. These Corinthian Christians had been sanctified, made holy, made SAINTS and this occurred when they became Christians. They were alive. Paul addressed six of his epistles to the "saints" (Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:2; II Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2). They were living, fleshly saints who experienced persecution (Acts 9:13; 26:10). They experienced physical need (Romans 12:13; 15:25-26). They were not dead. They were alive and they were saints.

Another fact that should be noted regarding the New Testament's teaching of how to become a saint is that it was not and is not limited to a select few. Compare that to Catholicism and the small percentage of members of that organization who are said to be "saints." In contrast, as previously noted from the Scriptures, all men and women become saints when they obey the Gospel. That's 100%!

Yet another fact on this subject that is worthy of consideration is that, according to the New Testament, a saint can actually lose his or her soul. Some of those saints about whom we read in the New Testament fell away from the faith (I Timothy 1:19-20; II Timothy 2:16-18; 4:10). Like all Christians, they had been "set apart" from the world by God through the blood of Christ when they obeyed the Gospel. They chose, however, to go back into the world. Paul spoke of these in Hebrews 10:29. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

One becomes a saint by virtue of obeying the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Everyone who obeys the Gospel is set apart from the world by God through the blood of Christ. A saint, according to the New Testament definition, can lose his or her soul because he or she is still alive and has the freedom to choose to back into the world. This is the New Testament truth regarding sainthood and it stands completely and entirely at the other end of the spectrum from the Catholic church's teaching on the subject. May we all search the Scriptures to know God's way and reject man-made doctrines.