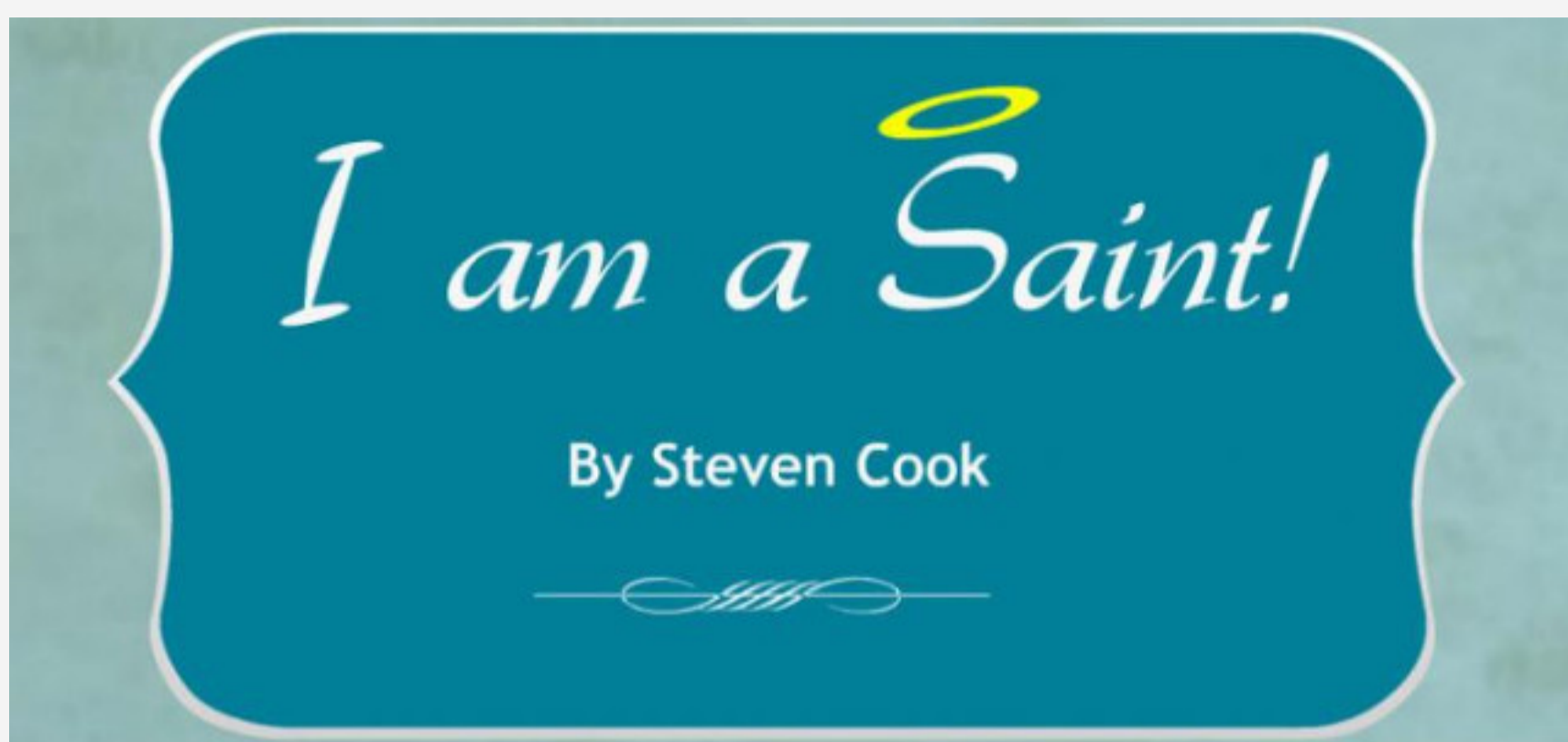


## I AM A SAINT

By Steven Cook<sup>1</sup>

I am a saint. It's true. The Bible declares it. At the moment I believed in Jesus as my Savior I became *Saint Steven*. Feel free to call me that next time you see me. The word *saint*, as it appears in the New Testament, is a translation of the Greek noun *hagios*, which basically means *holy* or *sacred*. Paul uses the term saints in his letters as a synonym for Christians (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21-22; Col 1:2). The Greek verb *hagiazō* is used with reference to saints who have been *consecrated, sanctified, or set apart to God* by means of the work of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews declares, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those *who are sanctified*" (Heb 10:14; cf. 1 Cor 6:11; Heb 13:12). Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth and regards them as "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:2). "In this sense, all believers are called 'saints,' irrespective of their spiritual attainments (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2). In the case of the Corinthians, their unsaintly character is especially evident (1 Cor. 3:1-4; 5:1f.; 6:1; 11:17-22). The Hebrew believers were saints, yet immature (Heb 2:11; 3:1; 5:11-14)."<sup>2</sup> Saints are not special Christians, but those who are made righteous because of the work of Christ applied to their lives. "The term is applied to all believers.

The believer can approach God only because he or she has obtained a righteous standing or position on the basis of Christ's work by means of faith."<sup>3</sup> Merrill F. Unger writes:

“ **The NT refutes the idea of a special class of "saints." Although it is true that in experience some believers are more "holy" than others, yet in their position before God all believers are "sanctified," i.e., saints by virtue of what they are "in Christ." The Christian's perfect position (Rom 6:1-10) is made a comfortable experience of Christ by faith (v. 11); "considering" themselves to be what they are in their person before God, they became such in their everyday experience. The more one's experience conforms to one's position, the more practical holiness is manifested in the child of God (saint).<sup>4</sup>**

Positional sainthood in Christ precedes practical sainthood in life. God, who made me holy by virtue of my union with Christ, also calls for me to be holy in my behavior. The apostle Peter writes, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior" (1 Pet 1:15). However, my status as a saint is based on my *new birth* and union with Christ and not any good works I produce. This is true of all "*the saints in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 1:1; cf. 4:21). As a comparison, my American citizenship is based on my birth, not my behavior. I was born an America citizen, and I may be a good citizen or a bad citizen, but my behavior does not change my status as an American. Likewise, my spiritual birth is the basis for my sainthood, and I may be a good saint or a bad saint, but my behavior does not change my status as a saint. I do not lose my status as a saint when I sin any more than I lose my status as an American when I break a law. I may suffer punishment for my sin, but that's a different matter.

Saints are sinners. It's a fact. That's just another way of saying Christians commit sin. Take for example the Christians living in the ancient city of Corinth. The apostle Paul opens his letter, addressing them as "the *church of God* which is at Corinth, to those who have been *sanctified [hagiazō]* in Christ Jesus, *saints [hagios]* by calling" (1 Cor 1:2). As you read through Paul's letter to the saints at Corinth, you realize many of these saints are spiritual babies who have yet to grow up and become mature in their walk with the Lord. Paul chastises them for their quarrels (1 Cor 1:11), jealousy and strife (1 Cor 3:1-3), fornication (1 Cor 5:1-2), and selfishness and drunkenness (1 Cor 11:21). Their behavior was what we might expect to see at a local bar rather than the local church. The saints in Corinth were certainly committing acts of sin, but that did not destroy their status as saints. Some people think saints are sinless, but that's a false idea. They did not get this from the Bible. Scripture teaches "there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins" (Eccl 7:20). Harold Hoehner writes about sinning saints:

“ **When it [hagios] is used substantively, it is used of those who are called saints (1 Cor 1:2) who may have practiced unholy things (5:1). In fact, the saints of Ephesus were admonished to stop practicing the lifestyle of those who were not saints (Eph 4:25-32). The reason that saints are to abstain from the sins of the ungodly is because their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:15-20) and because of their position as saints (Eph 5:3), not because they are inherently holy in themselves. The idea, then, is that they had the position of saints and thus were to act saintly. They obtained this position because they had appropriated Christ's work to their lives (1 Cor 6:11) rather than gained it by acting saintly.<sup>5</sup>**

Christians are saints, even when they sin. They are saints, not because they live saintly lives, but because the work of Christ has been appropriated to them, and they've been set apart to God by the work of the Holy Spirit. But let me state very clearly: **God always deals with his sinning children**. He desires to guide us from infancy to adulthood; much like a loving parent guides their own children. This means He disciplines us for our spiritual growth (Heb 12:5-11). This is just a part of the Christian life. I know some Christians who shy away from listening to any talk about discipline or suffering for spiritual growth, but they are the ones who have been stuck in spiritual infancy all their lives. Saints do sin, and God does discipline. The Scripture states, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb 12:6). The wise believer accepts God's correction. David writes, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Ps 119:71). David goes on to say, "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me" (Ps 119:75). The wise saint loves the Lord and wants to grow spiritually.



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<sup>2</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen and Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 288.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Book House, 2002), 139-140

<sup>4</sup> Merrill F. Unger, "Saints" In , in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, ed. R.K. Harrison, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Book House, 2002), 139-140.

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