

How to Recognize a Saint

Last week, I shared some adapted content from a classic of Christian literature, *Holiness* by J.C. Ryle, on what it means to be holy. I want to follow that up with another question: What does it look like to be holy? What follows is an adaption of J.C. Ryle's thoughts on the subject.

What are the visible marks of a sanctified man?
What may we expect to see in him?

1. True sanctification does not consist in talk about religion. People hear so much of gospel truth that they contract an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases, and sometimes talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think them true Christians. In fact it is sickening and disgusting to hear the cool and flippant language which many pour out about "conversion, the Savior, the Gospel, finding peace, free grace," and the like, while they are notoriously serving sin or living for the world. The tongue is not the only member that Christ bids us give to His service. We must be sanctified, not only "in word or speech, but in action and in truth" (1 John 3:18).
2. True sanctification does not consist in temporary religious feelings. Many appear moved and touched and roused under the preaching of the Gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. A kind of animal excitement from the contagion of seeing others weeping, rejoicing, or affected, is the true account of their case. Their wounds are only skin deep, and the peace they profess to feel is skin deep also. Like the stony-ground hearers, they "receive the Word with joy" (Matt. 13:20), but after a little they fall away, go back to the world, and are harder and worse than before.
3. True sanctification does not consist in outward formalism and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is to be seen in an excessive quantity of bodily religion, such as (1) constant attendance on Church services and certain gestures and postures during public worship; (2) in self-imposed austerities and petty self-denials; and (3) in wearing peculiar dresses, and the use of pictures and crosses. I am afraid that in many cases this external religiousness is made a substitute for inward holiness.
4. Sanctification does not consist in retirement from our place in life. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness, and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents, under the vain idea that by so doing they would escape sin and become eminently holy. They have forgotten that no bolts and bars can keep out the devil, and that, wherever we go, we carry that root of all evil, our own hearts. Our Master Himself said in His last prayer, "I am not praying that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15).
5. Sanctification does not consist in the occasional performance of right actions. It is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through all a man's daily conduct, both in great things and in small. Its seat is in the heart, and like the heart in the body, it has a regular influence on every part of the character. It is not like a pump, which only sends forth water when worked upon from without, but like a perpetual fountain, from which a stream is ever flowing spontaneously and naturally.
6. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual respect to God's law, and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ never made light of the Ten Commandments: on the contrary, in the Sermon on the Mount, He expounded them and showed the searching nature of their requirements. He that pretends to be a saint, while he sneers at the Ten Commandments, and thinks nothing of lying, hypocrisy, swindling, ill-temper, slander, drunkenness, and breach of

the seventh commandment, is under a fearful delusion. He will find it hard to prove that he is a “saint” in the last day!

7. Genuine sanctification will show itself in an habitual endeavor to do Christ’s will, and to live by His practical precepts. A truly sanctified man will never forget this. He serves a Master who said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).
8. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the active graces which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, and especially to the grace of charity. “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). A sanctified man will try to do good in the world, and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to everyone; and this not in word only, but by deeds and actions and self-denying work. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus.
9. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the passive graces of Christianity. When I speak of passive graces, I mean those graces which are especially shown in submission to the will of God, and in bearing and forbearing towards one another. We see this in the Model prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). This is the point which occupies one-third of the list of the fruit of the Spirit, supplied by St. Paul. Nine are named, and three of these, “patience, kindness, ... gentleness” (Gal. 5:22). The passive graces are no doubt harder to attain than the active ones, but they are precisely the graces which have the greatest influence on the world.