Privilege and Obligation

Rom 1:7

to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the address of the Epistle. The first thing to be noticed about it is the universality of this designation of Christians. Paul had never been in Rome, and knew very little about the religious stature of the converts there. But he has no hesitation in declaring that they are all beloved of God’ and saints.’ There were plenty of imperfect Christians among them, as there are in any group or congregation. Yet none of these imperfections in the slightest degree interfered with the application of his designations for them. So, then, “beloved of God” and “saints” are not distinctions of classes of individuals within the Church, but rather belong to the whole of the Church, and then to each member of the body.

The next thing to note, I think, is how these two terms, “beloved of God” and “saints,” cover almost the whole gamut of the Christian life. They are connected with each other very closely, and I think it amazing to mark how the one thought carries us deep into the heart of God and the other extends over the whole ground of our relation to Him. Think of it this way, the one is a statement of a universal prerogative, the other an enforcement of a universal obligation. In this lesson we want to look at these two thoughts,

1) The Universal Privilege

2) The Obligation of the Christian Life.

I) The universal privilege of the Christian life.

“Beloved of God.” Now we might have become so familiar with the juxtaposition of these two ideas, love and God, that we cease to feel the wonder of their union. That would be a tragic mistake, because until Christ had done His work, it was hard for man to understand how the two thoughts could be brought together.

Does God love any one? People sometimes pervert that thought. They think He loves so much that He won’t be just. They think He loves so much that He will overlook all sin. The answer is in the fact that Christ showed us the Love of God. All the world needs to do is look at the fact that God sent Jesus to die for all mankind to see the greatest expression of love ever shown. Think of the facts of life and the difficulties that people must face. Think of the facts of nature, disease, disaster, trials and think of the sorrows and miseries and pains, and sins, and wasted lives, and then maybe we can understand the saying from an unknown author…

Nature, red in tooth and claw, With rapine, shrieks against the creed' that God is love.
For a moment let’s think about what man has chosen to worship in his arrogance, ignorance, pride, rebelliousness, whatever his motivation. Think of all the varieties of monstrosity, not the less monstrous even though sometimes beautiful, before which men have bowed. Man has bowed down before so-called gods that in their minds demanded human sacrifice, infant sacrifice, even self-sacrifice. Mutilation of the body, torture and perversions performed in the name of worship. Then think about what God has established, what He has proven and demonstrated in His love, …

**Rom 5:8**

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

There is a dangerous trap that Satan has led many into. Brethren, God is Love…

**1 John 4:8**

8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

But the Love of God is rooted in His character and is defined by His justness. God’s Love demands that He save all those who come to Him through Christ and punish all those who disobey His Law. It is neither love nor justness to save everyone regardless of their obedience or disobedience. The point is that we should never ignore scriptural and then try to justify that disobedience with the Love of God.

The answer to the question, Does God Love, is obvious in our text, God indeed loves. But there is another question, Does the love of God for all mankind, make His special designation of Christians as His beloved a contradiction? Not at all. There is no contradiction between the proclamation of the universality of the love of God toward man and the very special application of His love towards those that are faithful. They who are in Christ are the beloved of God.

**John 3:16-17**

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

Surely special affection is not in and of itself inconsistent with universal love and care. It is a degradation of the conception of divine love, if we proclaim its indifference to men's characters. There is no honoring God when you say, It is all the same to Him whether a man loves Him and serves Him, or lifts himself up in rebellion against Him, and makes himself a god unto himself. To imagine a God who not only makes His sun to shine and His rain to fall on all mankind both the unthankful and the evil and the faithful, that He may draw them to love Him, but who is also conceived as taking the sinful who yet cleaves to his sins to His heart, as He does the penitent soul that longs to abide in Him and He in them, is to blaspheme, and to not honor the love, the universal love of God.
Friends, the great truth of the Bible is that God so loved the world that He gave His Son! But let us not forget that God’s Love disregards the character of the man on whom it falls. The point is that the Love of God was bestowed on all men in the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Think of it this way, to use a poor analogy. God’s Love is like a fountain of pure water. That fountain is constantly flowing and is there for all to drink from. That is the universality of the Love of God given to all men. But the more one drinks of the fountain the more one experiences the Love of God and shares in it. If a man chooses to not drink of the fountain, it doesn’t mean the fountain no longer flows, it means that man has chosen to not partake of it. That is the choice God gives us.

The sacrifice of Christ was for the sins of all mankind. Whether or not someone chooses to partake of that sacrifice is a personal choice. But the more one partakes of it through the scriptures the more one shares in the Love of God and experiences that Love as the rest of the world cannot. There are manifestations of the Love of God any man can receive; and each man gets as much of the love of God as he seeks. But rocky soil does not drink in the dew as a the good soil does; and the nature of the man on whom God’s love falls determines how much, and what manner of its manifestations shall pass into his possession and heart, and what shall not.

So, on the whole, we have to answer the questions, Does God love anyone? Does not God love all? Does God have a special love for some? The answer to all is, Yes.

1 John 4:9-10

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

God’s Love is a gift He has offered to all men, the extent of that Love that we choose to partake of is a privilege offered only to those who choose to come to Him through Christ.

The universal love of God is concentrated in Jesus Christ; and if we have Him we have it; and if we have obedient faith we have Him. Only in the Love of God and Christ can we say, Not life, death, things present, things to come, height, depth, any creature, or even Satan shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord and found in the Word of Truth.

This brings us to our next point…

9 II) The Obligation of the Christian life.

The text says “Called to be saints.” Note the two words “to be” are inserted here as a supplement. While obviously correct, we must be careful to not make them a future prediction. All Christians are called to be saints. That is a present statement and not futuristic.

There are some characteristics of being a saint that stand out.

10 1) They are called
2) Their consecration is dependent upon purity
3) This consecration is only seen in a complete commitment to God, in the whole of the Saint’s life.

1 Cor 1:2

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

12 1) They are called

In the context, Paul describes himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle or, more correctly, a called Apostle. The appointment of apostleship coincided with the call. If Paul was an Apostle because he was called to that purpose, then saints are saints because they have been called. The beloved of God are the called saints.

The word “called” here does not mean named or designated but rather summoned. It doesn’t just describe the name by which Christians are known, but also how they are invited. Summoned, called by God to be such. It is their vocation, not just their designation. Remember that saint and holy convey precisely the same idea. Set apart for a specific purpose.

The true idea of this universal holiness which belongs to all Christian people is consecration, dedication to God. In the Old Testament, the temple, altars, sacrifices, sacrificial vessels, persons such as priests, periods like Sabbaths and feasts, were all called holy. The common idea running through all these uses of the word is that of belonging to God, and that is also the root notion of the New Testament saint, someone who has committed himself to being God’s. God claimed us for Himself when He gave us Jesus Christ. We respond to that claim when we accept Christ. From that point on then, we are not our own, but consecrated; that is, saints.

13 2) Their consecration is dependent upon purity

The next step is purity, which is, in actuality, the basic idea of sanctity. Purity must follow consecration. Purity, in fact, defines consecration, and consecration demands purity.

1 Cor 6:9-11

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Paul says that it is a pure relationship with God, righteousness, that separates, sanctifies and consecrates, those who have been sanctified. True conversion is when a man yields himself up to God. This yielding is the very expression of commitment to God. It shows itself in the virtue, goodness, purity, righteousness, all the attributes of God that should be seen in His followers. And here is the real point, deep down at the foundation of all that a child of God is lies in the New
Testament idea of holiness, consecration of myself to God. This relationship with God, this idea that His followers would be Holy, sanctified, was established before time.

**Eph 1:3-4**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

3) This consecration is only seen in a complete commitment to God, in the whole of the Saint’s life.

If there can be anything like a so-called secret, completely yielding yourselves to God is the secret of all righteousness. And hear this like you have heard nothing else, every part of our complex, manifold being of humanity is capable of such consecration. If that were not the case then God would not demand it of us…

**1 Peter 1:14-16**

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

I set my heart apart if it abides in God. I set my thoughts apart if I take His truth for my guide. I set my will aside when it bows and says, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

There are, in fact, only two ways of living in the world, as narrow as it sounds, there are only two. Either God is our center, and that is holiness, sanctification; or we have made ourselves our center, and by definition, that is sin.

This last characteristic of sanctity, giving of our whole being to God in purity and righteousness, is only possible when we have come to understand that the yielding of myself to Him is only a reflection of His giving Himself to me. God first loved. You cannot argue a man into loving God, any more than you can hammer a rosebud open. But He can love us into loving Him if we will but listen and hear and heed. A God who has love for us will be a God, when we recognize that love, to whom it is easy to be consecrated, set apart, towards.

There is a privilege that God has given to all men in calling them to come out of sin. And there is a solemn obligation laid upon every one of us who call ourselves Christians, to be saints, in the sense that we must yield up our whole lives to Him to partake of that privilege. The Christian must strive, body, soul, and spirit, to perfect his holiness in the fear of the Lord.