

Stand Solid as the Saints of God

✠ **Live by the pattern of the apostles. (vv.17-19)**

✠ **Wait for the power of the Lord. (vv.20 – 4:1)**

In the name of Jesus, our solid Savior from sin, dear holy ones of God:

What if we wanted to experiment on American society? A prominent child psychologist could convince parents that all physical punishment is child abuse. Churches could debunk sound Bible teaching. About ten years later we could deal with the resulting teenage depression by telling them, “You’re special.” Preschoolers could learn to sing to the tune of “Frere Jacques,” “I am special, I am special. Look at me. Look at me.” After another twenty years can you imagine the results? You don’t have to. Psychologists have been surveying college students with a “Narcissistic Personality Inventory” since 1982. They discovered that love of self can have benefits such as meeting new people or getting on *American Idol*. And you know how well teens deal with rejection on that show. Lack of sympathy for others, anger at criticism, promoting self over helping your neighbor, broken romance, dishonesty and even violence to gain financial prosperity – what a self-destructive life pattern for college freshman! A solution? One tentative psychologist suggests: “Permissiveness seems to be a component....A potential antidote would be more authoritative parenting. Less indulgence might be called for.”¹

As always, the dear Holy Spirit has a better solution, one that really works now and forever. To children of all ages He says, **Stand Solid as the Saints of God**, first....

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Human selfishness is nothing new. The term “narcissism” comes from ancient Greek mythology about a youth named Narcissus who rejected a woman’s love and hopelessly longed for his own reflection in a pool of water. What else was it but self-love and self-advancement in the Garden of Eden when our first parents spurned our Creator’s loving care and chose death instead to be *“like God knowing good and evil”*? (Genesis 3:5,22) When the Lord’s Apostle Paul describes his culture, we can relate: *“As I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”* We would say, “They are obsessed with earthly things.” Self is still the motivation for psychologists trying to help today’s youth. They only give reasons like personal and societal benefit for curing at least some of these narcissistic tendencies. After nearly 6500 years of this world’s history since creation, we sinful human beings are still just trying to please ourselves.

The problem did not start in the ‘60’s, nor does it only affect our youth. Another God-inspired writer named James hits much closer to our homes and marriages when he asks, *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says [in vain: ‘The Spirit who dwells in us strongly opposes envy’? NETNT] But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and*

¹ © 2007 The Associated Press: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17349066/from/ET/>. Quote by W. Keith Campbell, University of Georgia, co-author of new study by five psychologists about harm to personal relationships and American society.

purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:1-10 NIV)

This sin of selfishness is a cancer that needs to be surgically removed by the sharp scalpel of God’s Word. The first deep cut is repentance. But the Great Physician of our souls only wants to heal us. He teaches us to grieve over our sins of “me-first, God-last and neighbor later” attitudes as we misuse God’s money, time and talent. Who can look up to God with such sins? Don’t we have to stand at a distance and with every tearful beat of our hearts plead, “**God, have mercy on me, a sinner**”? Jesus says, “**I tell you that [the tax collector], rather than the [proud Pharisee], went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**” (Luke 18:14 NIV) Paul, James and countless Christians have humbly admitted their sins to God and accepted the forgiveness Jesus won for all with His perfect life and innocent suffering and death on the cross. A new life of humble repentance is what Paul means when he says, “**Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.**” Better than heroes, we need role models who can show us how to live like the “holy ones.” These **Saints** God figures to be everyone who trusts in the life and death of Jesus for righteousness and holiness. **Stand Solid as the Saints of God and Live by the pattern of the apostles** who in humble repentance, put God first, neighbor next and self last. Pick up your cross and follow Jesus while here below we steadfastly...

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One of the reasons little boys don’t make very good gardeners is that they want to keep digging up the seeds to see if they’re growing. It’s hard to catch any fish if you’re splashing around in the water looking for them. A cozy, warm tree fort might not make the best deer stand if you’re asleep when the big buck goes by. What do all these have in common? The same thing that makes Americans angry if checkout lines get longer than two or three deep. We’re just plain impatient. High speed Internet access is never fast enough for all we want to do. Waiting in traffic is “unbearable!” Now or yesterday is when we want whatever. Never is how long we want to wait for anything good.

Lord, forgive us for our impatience, for the shameful way we reflect the sins of our society by our lust for instant gratification and personal advancement instead of the eternal glory of God. You have given us such great encouragement to wait for the seeds of your Gospel to grow in our hearts and lives instead of digging them up like little boys. Help us as skillful fishers of men to stop splashing around in the water and wait for your Word and sacraments to work at your own time in your own way. Keep us from settling down so deeply in our little tree forts that we miss the grand opportunities you bring by in this life and the far greater glory you have reserved for us in the eternal harvest of the next.

“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Talk about betterment of self – not just our eternal souls, but our bodies as well. God’s glory awaits us in heaven when Jesus comes to take us home. In that “*flash...twinkling of an eye*” when Christ calls every soul in every grave to “Come forth!” – “*we will all be changed...[when] the dead will be raised imperishable, and...[this] perishable [earthly body will] clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53) Infected here by sickness and disease, what encouraging hope to **Wait for the power of the Lord!** With the same **power** that raised Jesus from the dead, He will change these lowly bodies to be glorified like His – able to eat, but free from hunger, sickness and death; not bound by time and space like this old, earthbound body, but traveling more like “Beam me up, Scotty,” in the glory and bliss of eternity with God!

You are **the Saints of God** by faith in Jesus. Patience is a virtue we receive from Christ our Lord and Savior. He still encourages us through His holy Apostle Paul: “*Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*” **Live by the pattern of the apostles. Wait for the power of the Lord.** And He will be sure we are secure for all eternity in the glory that is His alone to give. **Stand Solid as the Saints of God.** Amen.

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