



WORKTALK WEEKLY

03 NOVEMBER 2008

Words That Need Redefining

Welcome to the New Series of WORKTALKweekly

Over the next few weeks we will have a look at a few of the common words we use to describe ourselves and see them in a different light.

3 Saint

What does it take to be a saint? The general consensus seems to be that if you show great patience in the face of exasperating circumstances, you may be designated a saint. The word conjures images of extremely pure and pious individuals who have obtained a degree of holiness or other-worldliness way beyond the grasp of most of us. Saints are those who hold true to their convictions even when the cost is extortionate.

Certain trades or professions adopt individuals who symbolize and represent them and may, in some way, come to their aid in time of trouble. Whole nations have their patron saints who adorn their artwork, flags or cathedrals.

One of the major qualifications for sainthood seems to be death. This gives the living a chance to assess a life from every angle and deliberate for a year or hundred to decide on promoting a person to the spiritual top table.

The various current uses of the word 'saint' form a perfect illustration of our obsession with elitism. We love to divide, to elevate some to lofty positions, while relegating others to the ranks of ordinary. We have become addicted to a spiritual class system where the privileged are venerated and the majority are mundane. Once again we have allowed the passage of time to distort our vision so that the person in the street, office, shop floor, factory or garden is patronized rather than honored, leaving lasting legacies of low self-esteem.

The stripped down biblical truth is that to be a christian is to be a saint. New testament writers didn't classify christians by assessing levels of holiness or piety and designate the high achievers as saints - christian and saint are interchangeable terms.

I would suggest to you that your challenge is to recapture the cultural and historical overlays that have been applied to the word and re-apply them to your working week.

Because you are a saint by new birth, you are called to holiness this week. A subtle separation, elegantly expressed in your working practices, should mark you out as a source of light and clarity in your environment of clouds. You are meant to be different, not by noble achievement, but by allowing your rescuer to develop the authentic model of human work in your daily life.

There is nothing wrong with becoming a symbol so that when others look at you they can say 'that's the way to do this job'. So you can be the patron saint of your office - not by patronizing your colleagues - but by holding closely to the complex christian values you believe.

And it does help to be dead - by dying daily on the cross, you carry with you wherever you go, so that self promotion is banned and other-centeredness is released. If you want to be a dead saint then learn to take the working practices of the cross into your week (you will need the WORKTALK course to help you know what that means in detail).

So here is a mental exercise to help you redefine the word 'saint' with a biblical twist. Fill in the blanks:

I am saint (your name) of (your workplace)
I am the patron saint of (my trade/profession/business)
I am saint (your name)

If you think that this is arrogant, self-promoting or faintly absurd, then try reading this piece again remembering that for all the new testament writers 'saint' just means 'christian' and 'christian' just means 'saint'.

God has joined up these things - we keep trying to divide them - it's time for joined up thinking this week.

Work well
Geoff Shattock

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BIBLE SECTION

Ephesians 1:15-19

15For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

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