**Living Theology Friends1330**

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 **“Sinners or Saints?”**

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Every person born in the world came into it as a sinner. Note below that the great apostle Paul included himself among those **who were sinners (past tense)**:

*Eph 2:1-3 And you* ***were*** *dead in your trespasses and sins, 2in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3Among them* ***we too******all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest****.*

Eph 2:1 says that Christians **were** dead in their trespasses and sins. That means sinners were spiritually dead and dead people cannot do anything in the realm in which they are dead. God does not hear the prayers of a sinner and Jesus is separated from sinners: *John 9:31 "We know that* ***God does not hear sinners****; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.* Jesus also is separated from sinners: *Heb 7:26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled,* ***separated from sinners*** *and exalted above the heavens;*

When Jesus said that we must be born again to see the kingdom of heaven, He meant that we must be spiritually born: *John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* When a person is spiritually born (regenerated) and is now in Christ, he still has the severe problem of a sin nature that must be removed. When we speak of ourselves as “being saved” we mean that we are saved from the wrath of God:

*John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

*Rom 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*

Everyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is forever under the wrath of God and that wrath is horrible to contemplate. Propitiation means turning away the wrath of judgment. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is that propitiation since Jesus took the wrath of God that was due sinners. He took the judgmental wrath of God for **all** the sins of every Christian.

By His grace God rescues sinners: *Eph 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us 5****even when we were dead in our transgressions****, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),* That grace of God saved us from eternal judgment and we did absolutely nothing to deserve it: Eph 2:8-9. **Every Christian is then no longer a sinner** (someone who practices sin) but is a saint (one who has the righteousness of Jesus in his account before God). The act of placing our sins on Jesus and His righteousness being put into our heavenly accounts is called justification or instantaneous sanctification or double imputation (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 3:26; 4:25).

Some people have used the following verse to declare that Christians are sinners: “*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.* (1 Tim 1:15) But such a conclusion is very poor exegesis. One should never build a doctrine on one verse and one need only look at the next verse to understand Paul’s meaning*; Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.* (1 Tim 1:16) Paul is stating that, because of his persecution of the church (actually of Jesus Christ: Acts 26:14) he was the greatest sinner saved by the work of his Lord, Jesus. He wanted all to know that regardless of their sins they could not be a greater sinner than he was before he was saved and so there is hope for anyone who would believe in Jesus for eternal life.

God gives a Christian faith (*Rom 12:3)*, which results in believing, trusting, and obeying Him. This faith is not something generated by people but actually comes from Jesus who also perfects it as a Christian matures (*Heb 12:2)*. So now a Christian is a person who has been born spiritually, has all of his sins placed into the account of Jesus who then took that wrath of God for those sins, and has the righteousness of Jesus Christ before God. Christians can freely come before God’s throne of grace to pray to the Father with no fear of His wrath (*Heb 4:16 Let us therefore* ***draw near with confidence to the throne of grace****, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.)* for they are now His children (*John 1:12*).

After this cleansing process a Christian enters a long, difficult walk in the world as his old sin nature dies and is replaced with the righteous acts of Jesus Christ: *Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.* This walk is called progressive sanctification. This time is challenging and during it Christians do sin but when they realize that they sin they will repent, not repeat the sin, and continue to grow toward that Christ-like state. A Christian cannot practice sin (be a sinner) and be a saint before God. The final state of a Christian occurs after death when God will glorify his body and then he will be like Jesus: *1John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.*

So salvation consists of three phases or stages: justification (or instantaneous sanctification), progressive sanctification, and glorification. But always remember that **a Christian is not a sinner**. This born-again person is already a saint while walking in the world being sanctified. Paul did not write to the sinners at Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae but to saints (Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2).

A sinner is someone who practices any sin (continually and habitually sins with no repentance) and that is what John means when he states in 1 John 3:9 (below) that “he cannot sin”. So born-again children of God are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9 *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*), all their sins were placed into the account of Jesus who suffered the wrath of God for those sins, and the righteousness of Jesus is placed into their accounts so that they are saints. Although Christians do still sin each transgression is quickly followed by repentance and a determination to not do it again. Some people want to classify Christians as those who are just **and** sinners but such is not Biblical. John clearly delineated those who practice sin and those who practice righteousness:

*1John 3:8-10* ***the one who practices sin is of the devil****; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9****No one who is born of God practices sin****, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious:* ***anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God,*** *nor the one who does not love his brother.*

If Christians think that they are still sinners then they may excuse their sin by saying, “Oh, I am just a sinner and cannot help myself”. If a person cannot stop sinning John says that they are still of the devil (1 John 3:8). Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and can by faith and with the indwelling Holy Spirit stop sinning although perfection here will never be achieved. The church will be presented pure to the Lord one day (Eph 5:27). Every person in the world is either a sinner or a saint. Which are you? Be sure!