

Sinner and Saint
1 Corinthians 1:1-11
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January 13-14, 2018

Two brothers tormented the small town where they lived for decades. They had blown up their families and were dishonest in business. They were loud, boisterous and just plain rude to nearly everyone. One day the younger brother died unexpectedly. The older brother went to the pastor of the local church and said, *“Preacher, I’d like you to conduct my brother’s funeral. And it’s important to me that during the service, you say my brother was a saint.”*

The pastor said, *“I can’t do that. We both know he was far from that.”*

The older brother pulled out his checkbook and said, *“Preacher, I’m prepared to give \$100,000 to the church’s building fund. All I’m asking is that you publicly state that my brother was a saint.”*

On the day of the funeral, the preacher began his sermon this way: *“Everyone knows that the deceased was a wicked man, a womanizer, and a drunk. He terrorized his employees and cheated on his taxes.”* He then paused for a second and continued, *“But as evil and sinful as this man was, compared to his older brother, he was a saint!”*

Last weekend we established that believers are forgiven and free and we heard Mike Russell flesh out how this applies in his life. Today we will see that we are both sinner and saint. One of the best ways to protect our spiritual identity is to guard who God says we are because a *Christian is a person who has become someone he was not before*. If you are a born again believer you have been...

- **Rescued from Satan**
- **Reestablished to serve**
- **Redeemed by the Savior**
- **Released of your sins**

A couple weeks ago I was driving our oldest daughter’s car for a few days and came across a note posted right next to her radio. Emily reminds herself of these five truths every time she gets in her car. I believe these come from a Bible study she did recently.

1. God is who He says He is.
2. God can do what He says He can do.
3. *I am who God says I am.*
4. I can do all things through Christ.
5. God's Word is alive and active in me.

I love all five of these statements but want to lean into the middle one today – *I am who God says I am.*

Because this brief series will only scratch the surface of our identity in Christ, we're going to look at a longer list of who it is that God says we are according to the Bible. I first heard these statements from Neal Anderson. If you want to dive deeper by looking up all the references, you can access the sermon manuscript online. Or you can download the document from the Sermon Extras tab on the website or on the Edgewood app. We also have printed copies on the resource table.

Let's stand and recite our identity together.

I Am Accepted

- I am God's child (John 1:12).
- As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ (John 15:15).
- I have been justified (Romans 5:1).
- I am united with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17).
- I have been bought with a price and belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- I am a member of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27).
- I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child (Ephesians 1:3-8).
- I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins (Colossians 1:13-14).
- I am complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10).
- I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16).

I Am Secure

- I am free from condemnation (Romans 8:1-2).
- I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances (Romans 8:28).

- I cannot be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).
- I have been established, anointed and sealed by God (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).
- I am hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-4).
- I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me (Philippians 1:6).
- I am a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20).
- I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).
- I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me (1 John 5:18).

I Am Significant

- I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life (John 15:5).
- I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit (John 15:16).
- I am God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- I am a minister of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).
- I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 2:6).
- I am God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10).
- I may approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12)
- I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

We're going to unpack two seemingly contradictory truths for those who have been saved – we are *both* sinner and saint. We see this most clearly in the book of 1 Corinthians. Corinth was a multi-cultural city known for idol worship and immorality. At one point it was home to at least 12 pagan temples. The temple of Aphrodite had 1,000 prostitutes dedicated to her worship. As one commentator said, "*Corinth had a pagan culture and a plethora of perversions.*" The phrase, "*to play the Corinthian*" was a synonym for loose living.

Paul spent 18 months ministering there. After he left, the church began to have some big problems. The assembly was filled with arrogance, quarreling, division and disunity, questions about marriage, lawsuits among believers, incest among family members, confusion about the Lord's Supper and spiritual gifts, a lack of love and false beliefs about the resurrection.

With that as a brief background, let's consider 1 Corinthians 1:1-2: "***Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to***

be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”

If you're saved...

1. You are a saint who has been sanctified.

- The word “**church**” means, “*a gathering of called-out people.*” Notice the church belongs to God but is located in Corinth. Likewise, Edgewood doesn't belong to me or to you; Edgewood belongs to God. God has called out a people who gather, grow, give and go with the gospel here in the QCA and to the ends of the earth. We have a baptism weekend in two weeks if you're saved and ready to take the plunge. Or maybe you've done that and you're ready to join Edgewood. Just let us know on your Connection Card. BTW, there is no perfect church. If Edgewood were perfect, as soon as I joined, it no longer was.
- Paul directs this letter to “***those sanctified in Christ Jesus.***” To be sanctified means, “*to be made clean, to be separated and set apart for a purpose.*” This definition has a negative and a positive aspect – we are separated from sin and separated unto the Savior. This is in the past tense, meaning this is something that has already happened positionally. 1 Corinthians 6:11: “***And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***” Hebrews 10:10: “***We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.***”
- We are called “***to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***” “Sanctify” and “saint” come from the same root word in Greek. *Saint* is the noun form of *sanctified*. When you are saved, you are immediately set apart because you now belong to the Lord.

Most of us push back when we hear that we're called “**saints**” by God because we know we're far from it. I called a sister in Christ a saint this week and she immediately became uncomfortable. I get that. Let's try it out. Turn to the person next to you and say, “*If you're saved, you're a saint.*”

I was raised in a tradition that taught saints were those who were canonized by the pope. These men and women were so superior spiritually that they were in an entirely different category. I was expected to emulate them and to ask for their intercession on my behalf. I grew up praying to St. Anthony if I lost something, to St. Christopher when we traveled and I watched people bury statues of St. Joseph upside down in their yards when they were trying to sell their house. I attended St. Bernard's Catholic School and hated St. Henry's because they were on the rich side of town.

It's not easy to become a saint according to the Catholic Church. One priest, who serves as a dean at Notre Dame, describes the process this way: When someone dies with the "fame of sanctity or martyrdom," a bishop begins an investigation. As soon as the person is accepted for consideration, he or she is called a *servant of God*. The bishop then looks for a miracle done by the candidate. The candidate's writings are also studied to see if they possess "purity of doctrine."

All of this information is gathered and sealed and then submitted to the "Vatican Congregation for the Causes of the Saints." Further investigation is conducted and if passed, the candidate is declared *Venerable*. The next step is *Beatification* and the candidate saint can then be venerated with special prayers. After beatification, another miracle is needed for *canonization* and the formal declaration of sainthood by the pope. BTW, the average time between the death of an eventual saint and canonization is 181 years, though the waiting time for two recent popes was very short.

Here are four differences between what Catholics believe and what the Bible teaches:

- In their system you have to perform a miracle to become a saint – The Scriptures teach that you become a saint when you experience the miracle of regeneration because of the crucifixion of Christ and the miracle of His resurrection.
- Catholics believe in patron saints – In Christ, there is no hierarchy because everyone who is saved is a saint. I like what Martin-Lloyd Jones once said: "*The gospel is open to all: the most respectable sinner has no more claim on it than the worst.*"
- In the Catholic Church, saints have to work their way to sainthood – The Bible teaches that becoming a saint is not a matter of what we do; it's all about trusting in the One who has already done everything for us.

- Catholic theology teaches you have to die before becoming a saint – My status as a saint is not bequeathed on me when I die but bestowed on me when I’m born again.

This reminds me of the young boy who was told it was time to go to sleep. His mom had been struggling to get him to stay in bed. An hour later his mom came into the kitchen and saw him standing in front of the pantry with grape jelly all over this face. The mom was exasperated and said, *“I thought you were asleep. What are you doing out here? We’ve talked about you not getting out of bed and you even prayed that you wanted God to make you a saint.”* The boy said, *“Yes, but I don’t want to become one until I’m dead.”*

The Bible uses the word “saint” at least 60 times to refer to believers who are alive. If a word appears once in the Bible it’s important. If it appears twice, it’s doubly important. If it appears 60 times, it’s extremely important!

Here are 9 additional references from Paul’s letters to the carnal Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 6:1-2: *“When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”*
- 1 Corinthians 14:33: *“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in **all** the churches of the saints.”*
- 1 Corinthians 16:1: *“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.”*
- 1 Corinthians 16:15: *“...they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.”*
- 2 Corinthians 1:1: *“To the church of God that is at Corinth, with **all** the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.”*
- 2 Corinthians 8:4: *“Begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.”*
- 2 Corinthians 9:1: *“Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints.”*
- 2 Corinthians 9:12: *“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.”*
- 2 Corinthians 13:13: *“All the saints greet you.”*

And here are a few more times the saved are called saints in the introduction to Paul's letters:

- Romans 1:7: “To **all** those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”
- Ephesians 1:1: “To the saints who are in Ephesus...”
- Philippians 1:1: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.”

Listen. If you're saved, you *are* a saint right now! We are not saints because we are so good; we are saints because God is so good.

And so, if you're saved *you're a saint who has been sanctified*. But because we still sin there's another side to this...

2. You are a sinner in the process of being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14 says: “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Sanctification is a past reality and a present responsibility. 2 Timothy 1:9: “Who saved us and called us to a holy calling.” To say it another way, believers are saints *in position* but we must work out our sanctification *in practice*. We could sum it up like this: “Become what you already are in Christ.”

What God has worked in, we must work out as Philippians 2:12-13 says: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” That's why we talk so much about daily Bible reading and involvement in Growth Groups. 1 Peter 1:15-16 calls us to live out our calling: “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.”

Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 1 and see how we're to understand our position and then apply it in practice. Drop down to verse 8: “who will sustain you to the end, *guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” To be “guiltless” refers to being “unaccused, irreproachable and free from every legal charge.” Colossians 1:22: “He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.” If you haven't memorized Romans 8:1, do so today: “For there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

We are positionally blameless but now we must practice the proper behavior. We see this in verse 10: ***“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”*** Another translation uses the phrase, ***“Now I beseech you.”*** On the basis of your position, start practicing it. Belief must translate into behavior. In other words, it’s time for saints to act like saints.

I like how affectionate Paul is when he says, ***“I appeal to you brothers...”*** But he’s also authoritative when he says, ***“by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”*** Incidentally, this is the 10th reference to Christ in the first ten verses! This shows how central the Savior is to our salvation and our sanctification.

The word ***“division”*** refers to ***“splitting, tearing and dissension.”*** Verse 11 says that the Corinthians are ***“quarreling,”*** which means they are fighting and backbiting. Once again, we see his affection when he refers to them as ***“my brothers.”***

I received an email this week from Duane Roesner who taught one of our Sunday adult Growth Groups for 23 years! Plus, he taught for 7 years at a previous church! Duane goes with the gospel each week by writing tracts and distributing them in parks throughout the QCA. We have these tracts available in the back and in different parts of the building. He shared with me that almost 4,000 have been picked up by Edgewood people in 2017!

Duane frequently taught on the importance of our identity in Christ. He would often ask his group this question, ***“Who are you?”*** The class would answer back, ***“A child of God.”*** He would then quote 2 Corinthians 5:17 from the NLT: ***“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”***

Let’s see if I can demonstrate our identity in Christ using these three vases...

The dark color represents sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they plunged the entire human race into sin and separation from God. The vase in the middle represents you and me [pour dark color into center vase]. We are sinners who are separated from God. This vase [hold up clear one] is pure and represents Jesus Christ. When we are saved, He immediately cleanses us from sin as Isaiah 1:18

says [pour clear liquid into vase in middle]: ***“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”***

It's very important to understand and embrace our true identity in Christ. I read a very intriguing post this week by Michael J Kruger called, [*Saint or Sinner? Rethinking the Language of our Christian Identity*](#). He points out that Christ followers are called “children of God,” “a holy nation,” “beloved” and most of all they are called “saints.”

That doesn't mean Christians don't sin. Even the Apostle Paul declared in 1 Timothy 1:15: ***“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”***

He writes: *“Indeed, Christians do sin, and sin in ways that are much deeper and more serious than we often realize. This is the whole point of Romans 7 where Paul laments the fact that he often does what he does not want to do. The entire Christian life is a struggle between the new self and the old self, and the latter often wins out. Paul can even refer to himself as a **“wretched man”** in Romans 7:24.*

*But, here is what is interesting. As Paul diagnoses his own law-breaking he concludes that whenever he sins, it is not the real Paul that is doing it. He declares, **“So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me”** (7:17). And again, **“Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me”** (7:20).*

Do not misunderstand what Paul is doing here. He is not trying to conjure up some excuse where he is not guilty of these sins...Paul knows he is culpable for these sins. But, in the midst of doing so, Paul is keen to make it plain that it is not the new Paul that is sinning, but the old Paul. In this sense, he can say that when he sins, he is not his true self.

Put another way, Paul's identity is bound up in the new man that he has become in Christ.

If so, then this explains (at least partially) why Paul is so keen to refer to believers as “saints” at the beginning of almost all his letters. Paul is not naïve about the fact that Christians still sin, and sin in major ways (indeed,

his letters are often about their sins!). But, he wants Christians to think of themselves in regard to their new natures, not their old. **They are saints who sometimes sin, not sinners who sometimes do right.**

And when our true identities are understood rightly, it actually affects the way we view (and respond to) our sins. We might think that the best way to appreciate the depth of our sin is to think of ourselves primarily in the category of “sinners.” But, this can actually have the opposite effect. If we think of ourselves only as “sinners” then our sins are seen as something rather ordinary and inevitable. They are just the result of who we are. Sure, we wish we didn’t sin. But, that’s just what “sinners” do.

If we instead view ourselves as “saints,” then we will begin to see our sin in a whole new light. If we really are “holy ones” then whatever sins we commit are a deeper, more profound, and more serious departure from God’s calling than we ever realized. Our sin, in a sense, is even more heinous because it is being done by those who now have new natures and a new identity.

And it is this “cognitive dissonance” between our identities as saints and our sinful actions that leads us to repentance. We repent because these sins are not ordinary and expected. They are fundamentally contrary to who God has made us to be. It is this tension between our identities and our actions that is lost when we cease to think of ourselves as saints.

In the end, I am not suggesting that Christians can never refer to themselves with the word “sinner.” If rightly understood, this can be fine. But, we should also be keen to think of ourselves as saints. After all, when Christ returns that is what we will be. In glory, there will be no sinners. Only saints.

I like this quote from Neal Anderson: “What you do doesn’t determine who you are; who you are determines what you do.”

And so, if you are saved...

- 1. You are a saint who has been sanctified.**
- 2. You are a sinner in the process of being sanctified.**

Watch this video to be reminded of who God says you really are.

Closing Video: [Identity](#)

This is our identity. And let's be reminded that *sainthood is a mission, not just a mindset*. We are set apart for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel according to 1 Peter 2:9: ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

On Wednesday morning I was out for a run and was slowly chugging up a hill in East Moline when I noticed a truck parked with its flashers on. As I looked around I saw a man walking in the woods. I decided to stop and see if he needed some help. He told me what he was doing and asked my opinion about it.

That led to him sharing that his wife died just six weeks ago. I was able to express sympathy to him. That led to the conversation going deeper and he told me he was an agnostic. I told him I was a believer in Jesus. He seemed open to talk so we engaged in some common questions about Christianity.

He then told me that he doesn't need to believe in Jesus because he keeps the Golden Rule. I said, *“Really?”* I can't keep it; how do you do it? He admitted he couldn't either. That got us right into the gospel and I explained that Jesus died as our substitute to forgive all our sins. He pushed back and told me that he's mad at God (he used stronger language than that). He then told me he's OK with going to Hell. I told him he's not really an agnostic if he believes in Hell and appealed to him to turn to Christ before it's too late.

While Bill didn't get saved I'm praying that he will...before it's too late. I tell you that for two reasons. One, maybe you're not saved yet. Two, if you are saved, you've been set apart as a saint to live on mission for Christ. See your interactions with people as God's appointments this week.

Remember this...

We become sinners by being born.

We become saints by being born again.

And if you're saved...

- 1. You are a saint who has been sanctified.**
- 2. You are a sinner in the process of being sanctified.**

Benediction

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)