

"SINNER OR SAINT . . . WHICH ARE YOU?"

In Wayne Jacobsen's book, "He Loves Me," he shares a 15-year-old girl's summary of an evening with her youth group: *"Same old thing. God is good. You are bad. Try harder."* In your most honest moments, do you sometimes feel this same way? Maybe things have been better lately for you in your walk with God . . . you've been more consistent with your devotions . . . you've been nicer to your friends, co-workers, spouse, children. You feel better about yourself. Or maybe things haven't been going so well lately . . . you've been struggling with placing God first . . . you keep doing the same, unhealthy (and ungodly) behavior, even though you've committed and re-committed to yourself and to God that you would stop. As a result, you don't feel very good about yourself . . . and you vow to try harder.

GOD DEFINES US AS RIGHTEOUS SAINTS

The word "saint," as used in the New Testament, refers to a believer in and follower of Christ and comes from the Greek word that means "holy." Scripture is clear concerning the nature of those who have given their hearts to Christ and placed their faith in Him . . . our identity is no longer based in our "old nature," but we have been given a "new nature." *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor 5:17). For we know that our old self was crucified with him [Christ] so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (Rom. 6:6-7).* Again, as believers in Christ we are not the same as before that occurred. Our old nature has died and He now lives in and through us . . . *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).* Our "core identity" is now "righteous" no matter what we do or do not do . . . and this true identity is not based in ourselves but based in what Christ has accomplished through His death and resurrection and by placing our faith in Him (Rom. 4:24; Phil 3:29).

WE OFTEN DEFINE OURSELVES AS SINNERS

So many people that we have seen over the years have struggled with this understanding, and often have felt anything BUT righteous. The very process of seeking counseling actually seems, for many, to contradict this truth, and thus they have thoughts such as, "If there wasn't something inherently wrong with me, I wouldn't need this counseling in the first place." "If I were 'righteous,' I wouldn't have this problem with (anger/addiction/fear/___)." "If I were 'righteous,' I wouldn't keep doing the same thing over and over and keep hurting my wife/children/myself." An important point to understand is that although we have become new people spiritually, we still live in a body that contains the "remnants" of sin. We still live in a world whereby the "flesh" (our old nature) is in conflict with the Spirit of God within us (our new nature) . . . *For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other . . . (Gal. 5:17).*

WHAT REALLY IS A NEW 'CREATION' AND DOES ALL THIS REALLY MATTER?

We like how James Bryan Smith addresses this in his book, "The Good and Beautiful God" (modified):

"You know how a butterfly becomes a butterfly? The butterfly was once a caterpillar, a worm. It could only crawl, and could not fly. But it goes into a cocoon—a chrysalis, in which the root word, appropriately, is 'Christ.' And it emerges a butterfly, completely transformed. The old has passed. The new has arrived. It was once weighed down by gravity; now it can fly. Christians were once under the reign of sin, but now we can live in freedom. And you can also see why it's so painful to me that so many Christians don't understand this? When I hear a Christian say, 'I'm just a sinner saved by grace,' I want to say, 'That makes as much sense as a butterfly saying, "I'm just a worm with wings'."

In our experience as counselors and in our own personal lives we believe this distinction matters a great deal. The bottom line is this: "AS A BELIEVER IN CHRIST, I AM NOT DEFINED BY MY SIN OR MY STRUGGLE." Yes, I struggle and I sin, but my core identity—who I REALLY am—is not a sinner who has been forgiven (as important as that is), but a "lover of God" who has a good and redeemed nature. And if my true identity has been redeemed, then my heart (spirit) is not sinful but righteous . . . it is good. If I do not internalize this truth, I will always be focusing on "getting better" and "sinning less," instead of resting in the love of Father God and allowing His kindness to "lead me to repentance (change)" (Rom. 2:4). So as we continue on this journey of sanctification (healing), which includes identifying our core areas of wounding and our sinful responses to those wounds, we must never lose sight of how the Father sees us or how He feels towards us. Remember, He is the God who runs and embraces sinners—including those who live in His house . . . believers (see Luke 15:11-32). Through the work of His Son, He does NOT see us as sinners, but as His righteous saints. And if that is how HE sees us, should we not see ourselves the same?

PRAYER

Please pray with us . . . Father, I am grateful for the work of Jesus in my life. Although I was once "lost in my sinful nature," because of my faith in You, I am now Your beloved child and I am a new creation. Yet, I still struggle with this reality. I still struggle with believing that You see me as righteous and I struggle with seeing myself in that truth. Father, when I reject this truth in the deepest place, I reject the completed work of Your Son. I don't want that. Lord, I declare that when You look upon me You see me as Your righteous child, and as a result, I, too, declare that I am righteous . . . a saint. . . a holy one set apart by You and for You. Please continue to take this truth into the deepest place in my heart. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

From the Father's Heart,

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