

Saint or Sinner?

April 18,2021

A Great, Spiritual Paradox

There are times when we know beyond all doubt that God has forgiven us, caused us to be regenerated, filled us with His Holy Spirit, and yet the mind can't reconcile those facts with the pride, selfishness and carnality we still see in our hearts and lives.

This paradox can be the source of great confusion, doubt, condemnation, and depression; tempting us to give up in pursuing God.

"The believer is a new creature, he belongs to a holy generation and a peculiar people — the Spirit of God is in him, and in all respects he is far removed from the natural man; but for all that, the Christian is a sinner still. He is so from [because of] the imperfection of his nature, and will continue so to the end of his earthly life. The black fingers of sin leave smuts upon our fairest robes. Sin mars our repentance, ere the great Potter has finished it, upon the wheel. Selfishness defiles our tears, and unbelief tampers with our faith. The best thing we ever did apart from the merit of Jesus only swelled the number of our sins; for when we have been most pure in our own sight, yet, like the heavens, we are not pure in God's sight; and as He charged His angels with folly, much more must He charge us with it, even in our most angelic frames of mind. The song which thrills to heaven, and seeks to emulate seraphic strains, hath human discords in it. The prayer which moves the arm of God is still a bruised and battered prayer, and only moves that arm because the sinless One, the great Mediator, has stepped in to take away the sin of our supplication."

—Charles Spurgeon, "We Are All As An Unclean Thing," Evening Reading, October 27

Psalm 38:4-8 ESV A Psalm of David

4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

5 My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness,

6 I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning.

7 For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh.

8 I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

Even the Apostle Paul saw himself as:

- *the very least of all saints (Ephesians 3:8)*
- *as one born-again by an "abortive" birth (1 Corinthians 15:7-10)*
- *the least of all the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:7-10)*
- *the chief, or foremost, of all sinners (1 Timothy 1:15-16)*

"The most godly Christian is the one who knows himself best, and no one who knows himself will believe that he deserves anything better than hell."

— A.W. Tozer

Reconciling My Standing Before God In Christ, With My Residual [Non-Dominant] Carnality

Sin must never be condoned, excused nor ignored.

I am saved, and God continues to forgive, even when my performance, at times, is so poor.

- God not only forgives, but He is simultaneously working to cleanse.
- I can't fix myself; only God can change and cleanse what's wrong in me. I must submit to His work and timing.
- We have not yet obtained all that the Cross of Calvary has provided.
- We are "stuck" in time, in a great spiritual limbo.
- At this time, God does not expect us to be sinless or perfect. He understands the frailty of our flesh and sympathizes with our battle against sin.

Hebrews 2:8-9 ESV

8 Now in putting everything in subjection to Him, He left nothing outside His control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him.

9 But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

Philippians 2:13 ESV

13 For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 1:6 ESV

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

The closer we draw to God, the more of our sinfulness we see. It may appear and feel as though our sinfulness is worsening; but the sin has been there all along. By drawing closer to God, we now see it, which is spiritual growth and the process of cleansing at work.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 ESV

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

10 "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind..."

The more we grow spiritually, the harder the flesh will rebel.

Romans 7:21-24 ESV

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Galatians 5:17 ESV

17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

We must understand the Biblical promise and process of salvation from sin:

- **Justification - we are saved** - once and for all by the Cross of Calvary

Romans 5:7-9 ESV

7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--

8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

- **Sanctification - we are being saved** - progressively, day by day, cleansed and freed from sin

Hebrews 12:11 ESV

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

1 Peter 4:1-2 ESV

1 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

- **Glorification - we will be saved** - when we finally shed this flesh of sin and mortal shall take on immortality

1 Corinthians 15:51-54 ESV

51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

"Recollect that there are two kinds of perfection which the Christian needs — the perfection of justification in the person of Jesus, and the perfection of sanctification wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. At present, corruption yet remains even in the breasts of the regenerate —

experience soon teaches us this. Within us are still lusts and evil imaginations. But I rejoice to know that the day is coming when God shall finish the work which He has begun; and He shall present my soul, not only perfect in Christ, but perfect through the Spirit, without spot or blemish, or any such thing. Can it be true that this poor sinful heart of mine is to become holy even as God is holy? Can it be that this spirit, which often cries, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this sin and death?' shall get rid of sin and death — that I shall have no evil things to vex my ears, and no unholy thoughts to disturb my peace? Oh, happy hour! may it be hastened! When I cross the Jordan, the work of sanctification will be finished; but not till that moment shall I even claim perfection in myself."

—Charles Spurgeon, May 15, Evening Reading

Romans 7:15–24 — Paul's way of making sense of the paradox.

Romans 7:15 ESV

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

- *Do you want to do God's Will as revealed in His Word?*
- *Do you hate the carnality and sin you see in yourself?*

Romans 7:16 ESV

16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

- *Do you believe that God's Word is the absolute, inerrant and unchanging source of all truth and the final judge of right and wrong, good and evil.*
- *Do you believe that because God's Word is the only source of truth, disobedience to God's Word brings nothing but evil, destruction and death, but obedience to God's Word brings goodness, wholeness and blessing?*

Romans 7:17 ESV

17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

- *Do you know deep within, that the residual carnality that you see in yourself is not the genuine, regenerated, Spirit-filled child of God that you know you are?*
- *Who and what do you identify with: God or Satan, good or evil, righteousness or sin?*

Romans 7:18 ESV

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

- *Do you have a passion, at times all-consuming, to do what is right in the eyes of God?*
- *Are you convinced by the life experience of failure, that you have no good but God, that apart from Him you can do nothing, and if anything righteous or good manifests in your conduct, it is only by Christ dwelling within?*

How God's Grace Manifests In Our Residual Carnality

Ephesians 3:8 ESV

8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

- *Jesus wants to use me, even in my brokenness.*

1 Timothy 1:15-16 NASB20

15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.

16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

- *Jesus wants to use me, as an example of His patience and mercy.*

1 Corinthians 15:7-10 ESV

7 Then he [Jesus] appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

- *Jesus will redeem and use my failures, to magnify His grace.*

2 Corinthians 12:7 ESV

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

"The saints are sinners still. Our best tears need to be wept over, the strongest faith is mixed with unbelief, our most flaming love is cold compared with what Jesus deserves, and our intensest zeal still lacks the full fervor which the bleeding wounds and pierced heart of the crucified might claim at our hands. Our best things need a sin offering, or they would condemn us." —C.H. Spurgeon

"You are not mature if you have a high esteem of yourself. He who boasts in himself is but a babe in Christ, if indeed he be in Christ at all. Young Christians may think much of themselves. Growing Christians think themselves nothing. Mature Christians know that they are less than nothing. The more holy we are, the more we mourn our infirmities, and the humbler is our estimate of ourselves."

—Charles Spurgeon