



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Kevin Wise

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Are Faithful Christians Still “Sinners”?

By Edward O. Bragwell Sr.

In what appears to be an effort not to appear self-righteous or prideful, we often hear Christians use catch phrases that they have picked up somewhere that may not be scripturally accurate. Such phrases as: “After all, we (Christians) are all sinners” and “The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints,” indicating that the church is made up of “sinners.” Also, by saying such things repeatedly, it gives one the sense that he does not have the right to firmly correct those in sin—after all, “we are all sinners.” In fact, those who repeat such phrases may be robbing God of His praise rather than magnifying Him.

Is that the way the New Testament talks about people who have been saved, having been made righteous by the blood of Christ? In the 42 verses where the word sinner (singular or plural) appears only one could possibly be construed to be referring to a Christian in his present state. That is 1 Timothy 1:15, where Paul said, **“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I AM chief”** (emphasis EOB). This is the verse that is cited by most of those who insist on constantly talking about what “sinners” they and other Christian are and implying that those who do not join them in such self-abasement, are prideful and maybe even Pharisaic.

Let’s look at this verse in context. This section of praise and thanksgiving by Paul begins with verses 12 and 13: **“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor,**

and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tim. 1:12-13, NKJV). Here Paul begins his praise for what had been done for him at a point in the past, using the past tense—**“has enabled,” “counted me,” “was formerly a blasphemer. . .,” “I obtained”**—all speaking of the life from which he had been mercifully saved and put into the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 14, he says, **“And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”** (1 Tim. 1:14). Now he exclaims how abundant God’s grace had been in saving him from his former life of sin (blasphemy, persecution, and insolence).

Then he injects verse 15: **“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”** (1 Tim. 1:15). This is basically saying how wonderful and merciful it was that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Up to this point he is praising the Lord for saving a sinner like he had been. Yes, and he says, **“of which I AM chief”**—in the present tense. (Incidentally, this is not the only time that Paul uses the present tense to describe his past life—see Romans 7:14ff). Given the context, he is clearly showing the greatness of the salvation and ministry that he had been able to receive, or to use his word, to have **“obtained”** despite the greatness of his sins of which he had been forgiven. He is not saying that he obtained that mercy and continued to be the chief of sinners. If that was what he was saying, then he contradicted everything that he said in Romans chapter 6 which begins with, **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** (Rom. 6:1-2), and then continues to show that those saved by grace are no longer **“slaves to sin”** or **“sinners.”**

Then, in what sense can he say, **“of which I AM chief”**? Was it because he had not been forgiven and still had to bear the guilt of all his sins? Of course not. Was it because the magnitude of his present sinning as a Christian was so great that he was still chief of sinners? Who can believe that? He is obviously speaking of his life’s history as a whole and that God’s mercy was so great that it could save and clean up a sinner like him. He was always aware of what a sinner he *had been*. That awareness kept him deeply humble and grateful for the grace of God in saving him from that condition.



Olsen Park Church of Christ

Then in verse 17, he shifts back into the past tense by saying, **“However, for this reason I OBTAINED mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life”** (1 Tim. 1:16, emphasis EOB). For what reason? The reason that Christ came into the world to save sinners and in whom he obtained mercy. Then he uses himself as an example or pattern (**“that in me first”**) for all who are going to believe. In other words, if Paul as chief of sinners could obtain mercy and be saved, cleansed, and freed from his sins, anyone can.

In the New Testament, “sinners” are those whose life is dominated by sin, the opposite of those who practice righteousness (cf. 1 John 3:7). The faithful Christian’s life is dominated by righteousness.

Notice some of the contrasts between the righteous (the saved, or Christians) and sinners:

If the RIGHTEOUS one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter 4:18, emphasis EOB).

Knowing this: that the law is not made for a RIGHTEOUS person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for SINNERS, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man-slayers (1 Tim. 1:9, emphasis EOB).

Notice the contrast between the **“you”** [the Lord’s disciples] and **“sinners”** in Luke 6:32-34:

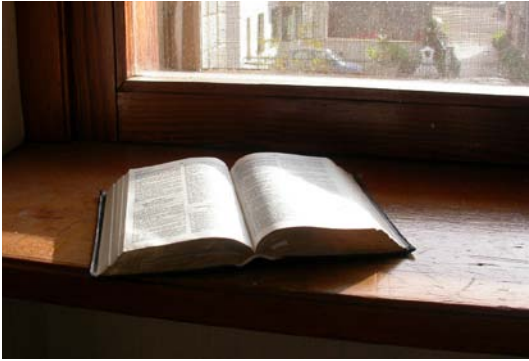
But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

Further, **“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been**

set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18). Here Paul says that **“slaves to sin”** (sinners) are what you were, but **“slaves to righteousness”** (i.e. the righteous) is what you are and should be thankful to God for it.

If Christians are still considered sinners, then what assurance do they have that God will hear them (John 9:31)?

The church is not made up of sinners, but of righteous people, *made and kept righteous by the pardoning power of the blood of Christ*. They are righteous because they practice righteousness and when they fall short, they depend on the cleansing blood of Christ to keep them clean (righteous) by forgiving them when they confess their sins (1 John 1:7-9). They are righteous people, though not self-righteous, because they know they did not, nor could they, make themselves righteous. They also know that they could not remain righteous were it not for the continuing access that they have to the blood of Christ. They are humbly thankful that they have been made righteous by the power of the gospel of Christ in which the righteousness



of God is revealed (that is, God's power and way to make men righteous), thus saving them from being sinners (a people living a life of sin). In fact, if one in the church goes back to being a **"sinner"** (one dominated by sin), he is to be put away from **"among you,"** if he will not repent and turn back to God (1 Cor. 5:13).

When one humbly refers to himself and his brethren as God's chosen people, and no longer sinners, he is not self-righteous. Nor is he glorifying God by referring to himself and other Christians as yet **"sinners."** By doing this, he is basically saying that Christ came to save sinners,

of which he is still one, having been left as such, even after he accepted the Lord's plan for making him righteous. This borders on the type of false humility that Paul condemns in Colossians 2:18, 23. What glory is it to God to say, "Even though he sent His Son to save sinners and He died to take away my sin, yet I am still left a sinner and unable to publicly acknowledge being clean (righteous) by virtue of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ"?

Saying one is a "sinner" does not mean he is totally depraved, nor does saying one is "righteous" mean he is sinlessly perfect. "Sinners" will sometimes do righteous acts, and the "righteous" will sometimes do sinful acts. I am happy and thankful to be counted among the "righteous" (by the grace of God) and no longer counted among "sinners." In the Bible, "sinners" are those whose lives are *dominated* by sin and the "righteous" those whose lives are *dominated* by righteousness. Paul urges meekness or gentleness on the part of Christians as they restore those overtaken in a trespass (sin), not "because we are all sinners" but "lest (we) also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Christians are made and kept "righteous" by the blood of Jesus Christ. This is why we have no right to boast except to boast in the Lord—but we do have that right (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 11:17, NASB, RSV). **"To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen"** (Eph. 3:21, NKJV).

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