

The “Was’s” and the “Are’s”

or

The Sinners and the Saints

I have twice been told lately, once in something I read, the other in a sermon, that the Lord sees His elect as already perfected. That seems an innocuous comment so long as it is viewed simply with the mind. But apply this to His Bride, His Church, and even more challenging, apply it to yourself, and the depth of the meaning of this is profound.

Are there proofs in Scripture that this is so? Yes. Lots of them. In the Old Testament, in God’s dealings with those who loved Him, we see Him always dealing encouragingly and lovingly, even when individuals chose to disobey Him. All through the many years and lives recorded in the Old Covenant, we see Him loving and merciful towards those who genuinely pursued Him. Upon whom did He exercise real vengeance? Upon those who despised Him, upon those who rebelled in their hearts against Him. But for those who loved Him, even though not perfect, He related to them as the God of promise, of protection, of provision, as a loving Father.

In the life of Jesus, we see two different attitudes He manifested: one towards unbelievers, another towards those who believed in Him. To the unbelievers, He spoke of God’s judgment; to believers, He spoke of God’s mercy. This pattern of affirmation for His disciples never changed, even when they let Him down, even when they failed miserably. Those in fellowship with Him were completely inside His grace – and even if He corrected them, there was so much love in His correction that they ended up being closer to Him afterward than they were before.

How did the early Church handle this? It is incredible to see this. Just to be sure it was true, I looked up every book from Acts to Revelation and could not find ONE PLACE where believers were called **sinners**. I found many references where they were called by redemptive pronouns like saints, the elect, chosen of God, etc. **BUT NOT ONE TIME WERE BELIEVERS CALLED SINNERS!!!!**

So what? Well, I thought about this awhile. You know, I have said more than once I am a sinner saved by grace. I thought that to be an accurate statement. But I’m beginning to see such a pattern of thinking in a new light. Here’s why:

A sinner is defined biblically as one who is in rebellion to God. It is not merely one who doesn’t believe in God, it is one who actively spurns God.

Now that **used** to describe my life. **I used** to live that way. **But I don't live like that now!**
Yes, I still stumble and fall short of the mark (the classical definition of sin), but now it is less often than before I surrendered my heart to Christ, and I am so disappointed when I do so.

Before I gave my life to Him, such an action would effect me so as to make me feel like running and hiding from Him (shame). Now such incidents propel me to Him to experience restoration and the complete forgiveness that He has already given me when He became my sin.

Let me share with you how the first century Body of Christ related to one another – and that from the “top” down, from the Apostles to the churches. Listen to these greetings as written in God's Word:

Romans 1: 7 **To all who are in Rome, BELOVED OF GOD, CALLED TO BE SAINTS!**
1 Cor 1:2 **To.....those who ARE SANCTIFIED in Christ Jesus, CALLED TO BE SAINTS!**
(with ALL who in EVERY PLACE call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord - - ((that means you – and me!))
2 Cor 1:1b ...to the church of God which is at Corinth **with ALL THE SAINTS WHO ARE IN ALL ACHAIA...**
Ephesian 1:1b.....**TO THE SAINTS WHO ARE... FAITHFUL**
Philippians 1:1b**TO ALL THE SAINTS.....**
Colossians 1:2 **TO THE SAINTS AND FAITHFUL BRETHREN**
Colossians 1:4 **YOUR LOVE FOR ALL THE SAINTS**
1 Timothy 2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith
2 Timothy 2 To Timothy, a beloved son
Titus 4 To Titus, a true son in our common faith
Philemon 1 To Philemon, our beloved friend and fellow laborer
1 Peter 1:1,2 **TO THE PILGRIMS..... (TO THE) ELECT.....**
2 John **TO THE ELECT LADY AND HER CHILDREN.....**
3 John To the beloved Gaius
Jude 1 **TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED, SANCTIFIED....AND PRESERVED.....!**

Now, do you want to just be altogether blessed? Consider for a moment that these salutations cover approximately the first 60 years of church history. These words, these salutations, these greetings in all of their expressions, were and are intended by God to tell us something about how not only these early Christians saw one another (because of their being IN CHRIST, but also today of how Christ sees you and me, because of our being IN CHRIST. Let's just extract the salutations and let these sink in to our hearts a bit. Are you ready?

**Beloved of God,
Called to be saints
Sanctified (note the past tense!!!) in Christ Jesus,
Called to be saints
All the saints
To the saints
Faithful brethren
Pilgrims
Elect
Elect lady and her children
Called
Sanctified
Preserved.**

Is this wonderful or what! Positive, Affirming, Confident, Pointing towards Christ, Encouraging, Faith-filled! Now where, tell me, are New Testament BELIEVERS greeted as sinners? The answer is: nowhere.

Why? Because they by faith embraced Christ and, if you will, traded in their sins, (which after all is what makes a person a sinner) for Christ's righteousness, for Christ's holiness, for Christ's loveliness! Could there be any better news?

So, my dear friends, I have made the decision to remove from my way of speaking, referring to myself as BEING a sinner saved by grace. I'm going to make a conscious effort to describe myself as a saint saved from sin by the grace of Jesus. Does it make a difference? You can count on it! How so?

Consider this: if I call myself a sinner, it is as though I still have not been redeemed from my sins; it is as though Christ's work on my behalf still has not been done or is only partially done. This is further an opportunity for my old man (my sin nature) to have the liberty to stir up rebellion and sin desires within me - because I have acknowledged my sin nature as still alive and well and kicking. This flies in the face of Paul saying, "You have died..... (note, these folks were quite alive when he penned these words!!!!!!!!!!). How could Paul have written such a thing? How can you be declared dead and still be alive? Was Paul playing word games? Not at all! He was saying in effect, "You have died to your sinful nature. You have consigned it to death. You have put your sinful desires under the feet of Jesus and He has now given you a new spirit, one filled with Him, with His fruit, His character, His Spirit.

Am I taking Paul out of context? No. Let's finish his sentence, written to the Christians who happened to live in Colossæ (Chap. 3:3) "You have died, AND YOUR LIFE IS NOW HIDDEN

WITH CHRIST IN GOD! If our lives are hidden with Christ in God, they are righteous. They are holy. They are redeemed! They are filled with joy! Hooray!

Are we perfect now, never failing? In the mind of God, absolutely. What our real challenge is in this area of our mind sets, is to do what God asks of us in Scripture, and that is to “Put on the mind of Christ.” And again, “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.....”(Phil. 2:5) and yet again, “But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor 2:16)

Dear friend, my challenge to us today is this: If we have surrendered our lives to Jesus Christ, if we say with our lips that we are daily putting on Jesus Christ the Lord, then let’s adopt His vocabulary. Let’s begin to think of ourselves and of one another as redeemed. Yes, we are in process; yes, we will fall and make mistakes. But we have been purchased. To be redeemed, means to have been bought and paid for. We are no longer sinners, unable to help ourselves, alienated from God, separated from the joy of fellowship with Him. We are His. His is ours. He is our Father who has literally loved all of hell out of us and all of heaven into us. Embrace Him! Confess Him! Keep running to Him! Rest in His forever embrace! Be the saint He has made you!

So to the saints in Robin’s circle of friends, to each of you who are

**Beloved of God,
Called to be saints
Sanctified in Christ Jesus,
Called to be saints
All the saints
To the saints
Faithful brethren
Pilgrims
Elect
Elect lady and her children
Called
Sanctified
Preserved.**

Still running, still loving, still being loved, and longing to encourage you with the encouragement I have received from Him.

Grace to you and peace from the Lord Jesus Christ and our Father.

Saint Robin