

SAINTS OR SINNERS?

I believe this is one of the most important and most misunderstood points in God's Holy Word. Are you a saint, a sinner, or perhaps both? Scripture makes it very clear that you are a saint, NOT a sinner. Before you let your mind run free, this does not mean you do not sin, rather, you are a saint that sometimes sins, or a sheep that sometimes acts like a goat. The difference is that you are not a sinner as a noun, rather a sinner when used as a verb. You cannot be both. To use another illustration, if you have a splinter in you, are you a block of wood? NO! Likewise, just because we have sin in us, it doesn't mean we are sinners. Paul even says, "And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer **I myself** who do it, but it is **sin living in me**" (Rom 7:16-17). Note Paul is not the sinner, he is the saint that has sin in him. Note also that his identity is not bound up in the sin, but that he "himself" is different than his "body." We are a trinity of body, soul and spirit. It is our body that we often look to as our identity, but the fact is that our body is merely a tent or house for who we really are. It just so happens that we live in a dirty house with sin in it. Paul again states, "Now we know that if the earthly **tent** we **live in** is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked" (2 Cor 5:1-3). If our tent blew down, our heavenly body would remain standing, therefore, I am not what you can see physically, my identity is what you can't see, my soul and spirit. You can only see my house, not what is inside. Now let's look at what is inside these tents of ours. Jesus states, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains **in Me** and **I in him**, he will bear much fruit; **apart** from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain **in Me**, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers" (John 15:5-6). Note that we are **IN** Christ. For every verse that states that Christ is in us there are ten that say we are in Him. I know it doesn't FEEL like you are in Christ, but what does the Bible say? It doesn't matter how you feel, it matters what you ARE. If we are in Christ and He is in heaven, we are in heaven! That is also what Scripture says, "Since, then, **you have been raised with Christ**, set your hearts on things above, **where Christ is seated** at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For **you died**, and **your life is now hidden with Christ** in God. When **Christ, who is your life**, appears, then you also will appear **with Him** in glory. Put **to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Col 3:1-5). Christ IS YOUR LIFE. Christ cannot have in Himself any sin. Your body is not in Christ, but YOU are. Note also that you died! Romans tells us, "For we know that our old self was **crucified** with Him so that the body of sin might be **done away with**, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—" (Rom 6:6). Your old self was killed and, therefore, cannot be resurrected. One might say God didn't change you, He exchanged you. You died with Christ so that you could be made new; "to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the **new self, created** to be like God in true *righteousness and holiness*" (Eph 4:23-24). You are not a sinner, but a righteous and holy being in Christ. Some people are uncomfortable saying that they are a saint because they know their sins. The difference is that Christ has forgiven those sins, nailing them to the cross: "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that *was against* [past tense] us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14). True, we

were born sinful. Being born was our ticket to hell. However, through Christ we can be born again and made new in Him. God does not operate or judge on a performance based system, even though we unrightfully do so ourselves. God looks at us and He sees a saint, even when we sin. We look at ourselves and see the sin and not the saint because that's what the devil wants. He wants you to go by what you feel, not what God says. God's definition of a hypocrite is someone who pretends to be what they are not. Satan's definition is someone who acts contrary to the way they *feel*. Satan wants us to act on feelings in order to be blinded by truth. We want to keep pretending we are sinners (noun) because we feel like sinners, even though God tells us we are saints. Paul always writes his letters to the "saints" not the "sinners" of Ephesus or Corinth, etc.. (Rom 15:31,2 Cor 8:4, 9:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:26; Jude 1:3). Even in the Old Testament before the law was given (Rom 5:13), Job saw himself as blameless, upright and righteous: "let God weigh me in honest scales and He will know that I am blameless—(Job 31:6; see also 9:21). His friends kept telling him, "no, you are a sinner. Repent and be healed." Who did God say was right? "After the LORD had said these things to Job, He said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has'" (Job 42:7). Job knew he was a blameless saint even though he sinned, because those sins were not counted against him and they certainly didn't change his identity if they were forgiven. God fixed it so that your old self died. If when you were born again the old self was still there, you would be like Siamese twins with one good and one bad. As the Bible puts it, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." But as Jesus said, "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand [remember our bodies are our house]" (Mark 3:25). Ephesians tells us Christ, "chose us **in** Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph 1:4). Just as this single page would be pierced if I nailed this book to a wall, we were **IN** Christ before Creation, we were **IN** Him as we walked the road to Calvary, we were **IN** Him as he hung and died on the cross, and we were **IN** Him when He rose from the dead. We don't resurrect our old self, we leave it on the cross. As Romans so beautifully puts it, "We *were* therefore buried **with** Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ *was* raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we, too**, may live a **new** life. If we *have been* united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self *was* crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—" (Rom 6:4-6). Note the italicized verb tenses in the above Romans passage. They are past tense. We are not called to crucify our old self because Christ already did it. We are His workmanship, "created" in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10). I once read an analogy of an electric tool. We are like these tools. Without being plugged into the energy source (God) we become nothing but paperweights. Our identity is tied up in the energy source. Without the juice the tool loses its individuality. It is Christ's life in us that gives us our identity.

Some people think that we are to emulate the life of Christ. You can't! God doesn't even want you to try. God doesn't want to simply "help" YOU lead a better life, He wants to do it ALL for you. Likewise, God didn't "help" you get saved, He did it ALL for you. As Habakkuk said, we would be: "guilty men, whose own strength is their god" (Hab 1:11). Most everyone knows the poem "Footprints" which illustrates this "independent" attitude. As you recall, the poem goes through life showing how there

were two sets of footprints in the sand until the times were tough and then there were only one. When asked why God left him alone, God said, “Oh, that was when I carried you.” Though a beautiful poem, it isn’t quite theologically accurate. It implies that I can be independent and only need Christ to carry me when things get too tough for ME to handle. NO! Christ carries us through our entire life.

Romans states, “For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were *reconciled to Him through the death of His Son*, **how much more**, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life” (Rom 5:10)? So often we focus too much on the death of Christ in this verse, but that is a mistake. Don’t get me wrong, that is important, but let us look closer. We are already saved, or reconciled from HELL by His death, but there is “much more.” We are also saved by His LIFE. Saved from what? His life through you saves you from bearing the burdens here on earth. Christ’s death saved you from hell and His life saves you from hell on earth. Sometimes we make Jesus the focal point of our life, failing to make Him our LIFE. As the Bible clearly tells us, “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). If God removed His life from this earth, we would all vanish. Somehow we think our flesh is our identity and we try to work independent from Jesus at times. We can’t. No matter how hard WE try, WE can’t stop sinning and become a “better” Christian. I used to look at my life and think, “when I stop saying bad words, then I will be a good Christian.” Then it was, “when I stop losing my temper, then I will be a good Christian.” I kept trying to work my way up the ladder. It wasn’t until I realized I was a saint and let God work through me that the Gospel of salvation began to change my heart, which in turn changed my actions. Before, I was trying to change my actions so that my heart would be changed. It didn’t work that way. “You, however, are *controlled not by the sinful nature* but **by the Spirit**, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (Rom 8:9). Again, we are not sinners saved by grace, but saints who have the capability to sin, but long to overcome it.

Bill Gillham, in his book *Lifetime Guarantee*, talks about the minds “green highway” in which our thoughts become entrenched into our brain. Once you think about something a line is formed in the brain. The more the same thought pattern is used the more the line becomes a trench. Eventually it turns into a path, a road, and finally a green (color of garbage) highway. If the road is not traveled the grass and weeds will begin to cover it up again. For example, the more one practices a foreign language the easier it becomes to recall information. However, if the road isn’t traveled on, the information gets harder and harder to pull up. Eventually, if you don’t use your foreign language for many years, those thought patterns almost disappear. The point of all this is that, as a saint that sins, one cannot expect to be good all the time, because the power of sin still resides in our flesh, but that doesn’t change who you are. Just because our flesh is there does not mean one isn’t capable of sinning less and less as we become closer to God and refuse to use those old green highways. James says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). We do have the capability to resist the evil thoughts Satan puts in our mind because Christ is in us and we are in Him. Once a thought enters the brain we have a choice to respond or ignore it. Using Christ’s strength we can ignore that thought. The more and more we resist these temptations, the more they dissipate. On the flip side, when things of God are put in our thoughts, those good highways become well traveled and lead to a joy filled life. This is why Paul wrote, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against

the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Every thought should be taken captive and analyzed to be sure it is in line with Christ-like obedience. If not, resist and ignore it. Again, we can’t do this perfectly, however, as Scripture states, “ Physical **training** is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, **holding promise** for both the **present life** and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this **we labor and strive**), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men” (1 Tim 4:8-10). This type of training gives joy for this present life, but it is something we work at and can only obtain by using Christ’s strength in us. However, to use it, one needs to recognize it is there. God wants more than our salvation, He wants us to reap the benefits of all the blessings He has to offer us on this side of heaven. Eternal life is yours already. You are already seated with Christ in heaven, so act like it! We are what we think we are. You believe you are a sinner, you will act like it. Believe you are a saint and you will act like a saint. Think about it, does the law ever motivate you to do good? NO! I don’t steal because I am afraid of getting caught. I don’t steal because I love Jesus and I don’t want to do anything that would displease Him: “*For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died*” (2 Cor 5:14). Likewise, thinking you are a sinner and that you NEED to change won’t motivate or give you the strength to become better. Paul shows us that the law KILLS, it doesn’t build you up and give LIFE: “He has made us competent as *ministers of a New Covenant--not of the letter* but of the *Spirit*; for the *letter kills*, but the *Spirit gives life*” (2 Cor 3:6). Realizing you are a saint under the New Covenant, and your response to that tremendous gift will be your Gospel motivation and power to change. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains in Me and I in him**, he **will** bear much fruit; **apart from Me** you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Branches can never PRODUCE fruit, they can only BEAR fruit that is produced by the life of the VINE through them. That is also why we, as saints, are not under the law. Consider the following:

- 1 Tim 1:9 “We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious.”
- 1 Cor 9:20 “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though **I myself am not under the law**), so as to win those under the law.”
- Rom 7:6 “But now, by **dying** to what **once bound** us, we **have been released from the law** so that we serve in the **new way of the Spirit**, and not in the old way of the written code.”
- Rom 6:14 “For sin shall not be your master, because **you are not under law**, but under grace.”
- Gal 5:18 “But if you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under law**.”
- Gal 3:12 “The **law is not based on faith**; on the contrary, The man who does these things will live by them.”

- Rom 8:2-3 “Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”

This is the heart of the Gospel message. Not until we stray from Christ does the law need to be in the life of a saint. But thinking as sinners, we love to beat ourselves with the law saying, “This is the third time I have done this,” or “This sin is too big to be forgiven,” and “I must change before the forgiveness becomes effective.” How many times do we ask Christ to forgive us and then go away feeling guilty because we still FEEL that we are bad. That is like saying to Christ, “Thanks for the forgiveness, but I must do more in order to be forgiven. What You did wasn’t good enough.” Can you see the performance based grade report we give ourselves under the law? Can you see how we lessen the joy available to us in forgiveness? If I am good I FEEL like a saint and if I am bad I FEEL like a sinner, no matter what the Bible says. Again, feelings lie, the Bible does not. One of Satan’s biggest tools is our feelings. If we operated all of our lives using feelings as our guide, where would we be? In contrast, think how joy filled we would be using Truth as our guide. The truth is – you a saint! Think about Lot. No matter how hard I try to find “saint-like” qualities in him, I can’t, but 2 Peter 2:7 says he was righteous. I try to make him a saint based upon his performance and how I feel about him, but God declared him righteous based on truth (note this was before the law was given, which is the same as after the law was taken away in the New Covenant). We want to live under Moses, but if we do we will die: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and *truth* came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Only God’s grace can change a person to be obedient to God’s law. You see we are under the “law of love, written in our hearts” (Hebrews 10:16). Law, motivated by love, is Gospel.

Have you ever wondered why we have both the body and blood of Christ in communion? It was in Christ’s body that we were crucified and then reborn according to Romans: “So, my brothers, you also died to the law **through the body** of Christ, that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God” (Rom 7:4). Through the body of Christ we died to the law and became saints. Hebrews states, “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). We have been made holy in our Spirit-body (our true identity) through the body of Jesus. What was His blood for? Forgiveness! It is through the necessary shedding of the blood of Christ that we were forgiven, but it was His body that exchanged our identity from sinner to saint: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Remember the testimony of Jesus’s words about the Temple, “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man’” (Mark 14:58). What was Jesus talking about? His body! After three days God raised up the Temple of God, Jesus Christ. Understanding that we are IN Christ, that third day resurrection also made us new as well. We are the new Holy of Holies of which Jesus spoke. In the Old Testament the Jews were forgiven when the high priest went behind the veil into the Holy of Holies. If the sinners themselves would have gone behind that veil they would have perished. However, when Christ died that veil was

torn in half, allowing free passage into the Holy of Holies. Because of our new identity we are holy and can enter into God's presence. We read in the words of Paul, "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? **For we are the temple of the living God.** As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people'" (2 Cor 6:16). How can this be? Because we are not only forgiven through Christ's blood, we are also made new through Christ's body.

This is also why at Christ's return it is our bodies that are changed, not our spirit or soul (I Cor 15:51-53). Again, our identity is not the body, but the soul and spirit. When we eject from our body, Satan can no longer give us a hard time because our sin is in our body (our building WE live in).

How does repentance fit into all of this? Repentance is mandatory for regeneration. One must *want* to be changed into a new creation before God will do it. If you love your life, chances are you will not repent because there will be no motivation for change. "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). As Scofield once said, "Repentance is not an act separate from faith, but saving faith implies that change of mind which is called repentance." There are many Scripture passages which show that repentance was a forerunner to faith. John the Baptist was preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mat 3:2). John knew Jesus was coming and, therefore, he was sent to be a "voice calling in the wilderness" to "prepare the way" for Christ (Mark 1:3). As Jesus began His earthly ministry Matthew states, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Mat 4:17). Jesus knew that, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor 7:10). Peter, as well, preached to the Jews saying, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19; see also Acts 17:30). Repentance is a big step because often times it means swallowing pride, and worse yet, admitting you are not lord of your ring. The first step in a joy filled life with Christ is to abandon YOUR life and cling to Jesus as LIFE. We read in Colossians, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, *who is your life*, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col 3:1-4). The key is to surrender your life for His: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it" (Luke 9:24).

Maybe some of you are still thinking, "if we don't have the law what is to keep people from going crazy with sin under the Gospel?" Scripture answers that one as well: "What then? *Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?* **May it never be!** [Why?] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, *you became obedient from the heart* to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having *been freed from sin*, you became *slaves of righteousness*" [note, slaves are controlled by their master] (Rom 6:15,17-18 NAS). Paul also asks an important question in the book of Galatians, "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard" (Gal 3:2)? What is your answer? By believing right? You received the Spirit by faith alone. Verse three then goes on, "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to

attain your goal by human effort” (Gal 3:3)? Do we now then try to add to our faith, good works through the law? Never. We are not under the law. You cannot try to live out your sainthood by yourself, you must just believe what Christ says and act like it.

This would not be complete without looking at what sin is. We so often think of sin as being a verb, however, Scripture most frequently calls it a “power” and uses it as a NOUN. In light of what we discussed about the law, it is interesting to take note of Paul’s words, “The sting of death is sin, and the *power of sin is the law*” (1 Cor 15:56). For many, this may sound like I am going off the deep end, but please hang in there, and most importantly, take a moment to pray right now that God would give you an open mind to openly and honestly examine what He says, not what we feel.

To find the meaning of anything we go to its origin. For example, if I wanted to know what “gay” meant, I could look it up in a dictionary and find out that that word originally meant happy. Today, because of sin, it now means homosexual. So let’s look at the true meaning of sin by going to its origin. Sin first appears in Genesis when God warns Cain about sin: “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; *it* desires to have you, *but you must master it*” (Gen 4:7). The literal translation of the Hebrew says, “you must master HIM.” Did you catch that? God has shown us Satan’s secret. Sin is a noun with personality and thought. Sin is a power that can give Cain thoughts and suggestions, even making Cain think that these thoughts originated with himself (Satan’s biggest trick). You see, God dwells within your spirit (1 Cor 6:17), but sin dwells within your body (Rom 7:23). When we talk about sin, it is important to differentiate between sin as a noun (*hamartia*), and sin as a verb (*hamartano*). I am not supporting the false idea that one can say “the devil made me do it,” however, I am saying that we have the power to say “NO” to sin with consistency, though never perfection. To blame sin on the “old man” within me promotes denial and flies in the face of what Romans 6 clearly tells us. To say the “sinful nature” in me causes me to sin suggests that it is normal for a Christian to sin several times a day, sometimes even overtly. This lie comes from the devil, the father of lies, and his secret is exposed when we examine the Scriptures further. We will see that sin is a power as Genesis showed us.

As I have been pointing out, our “old self” was crucified, killed, done away with, and never to be raised up again (Rom 6:6). Satan can’t raise him up and God won’t. What I am about to say is going to shock some of you, but please read on and I will show you that Scripture says it, not me. *Christians* have only one nature, a divine one, not a sinful one. “Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature* and **escape** the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Pet 1:4). I know we feel like we have a sinful nature, but that is Satan’s successful secret. Through the power of the Spirit I pray that secret will be exposed in the following paragraphs. Many of you may be thinking of Romans 7:18 which reads, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” The Hebrew word used for “sinful nature” is *sarx*. The NIV translation of the Bible took the liberty of translating that word as “sinful nature,” 23 of the 151 times it is used. Only the NIV did this. Other Bibles translate it as *flesh* or *body*. The point is, “sinful nature” just isn’t there. People often use Romans 7 to show that man has two natures, however, look closely and you will see man only has one nature, a good one. Is Paul happy about failing on his good

intentions? Does part of him find delight in his screw up? NO! Paul longs to do good and hates the sin (noun) within him. There are two characters represented in Romans; Paul, and sin. That is why he says, “As it is, it is no longer **I myself** who do it, but it is **sin** living in me” (Rom 7:17). He goes on in the next verse to tell us that the power of sin lives in his flesh, though sin is not Paul’s identity. Satan loves to get you to think YOU are the one who comes up with these *sinful* ideas and YOU are responsible for the memory traces within your brain. The fact is, however, SIN is crouching at the door and desires to have you FEEL that YOU screwed up and, if possible, FEEL guilty and unforgiven. In Romans chapters 5-8 the word “sin” appears 41 times and only in one case is it translated as a verb (*hamartano*) in 6:14: “For *sin* (noun) *shall not be your master*, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we *sin* (verb) because we are not under law but under grace? By no means” (Rom 6:14-15)! To understand our victory in Christ, one needs to understand sin as a power, as a noun. Therefore, SIN offers thoughts to your flesh for you to consider. SIN then deceives you by making you think these are YOUR thoughts. Only when you *act* upon those thoughts do you become accountable. That is Satan’s greatest tool against the saints. Go back and read through Romans 5-8 (in any translation other than NIV) and try and find a place that shows that the old man is still alive. It isn’t there.

If the sinful nature is non-existent in a Christian’s life, who is our battle with? Paul writes, “I see another law at work in the members of my **body**, waging war against the law of my **mind** and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Rom 7:23). Here we see our enemy is identified as the “law” or the power of sin. Also, this enemy is not living in my **mind** where thoughts are generated, but in my **body**. Therefore, our mind is at war *against* this evil power that God identified back in Genesis 4. Why is your mind against this power? Because God has written His law in our mind: “I will put My laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Heb 10:16). You see, your **mind** *wants* to obey God and, therefore, the evil power in your **body** battles *against the law of God* in your **mind** (Rom 7:23). “For who has known the mind of the Lord that He may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). Our mind is the good guy, and there is not a battle of a good you and a bad you going on, rather a battle of the good you and the evil power of sin (noun) within your body. One might say you have a bad roommate that you can’t get rid of. Does this mean the roommate can MAKE you do things you do not *want* to do? NO!

How can we apply this knowledge to our lives? When the power of sin presents a thought to your mind, the trick is to take that thought captive and reject those that are not in line with Godly things: “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). You see, you are not dead to sinning, you are only dead to the power of sin over you. That is why Paul said, “sin (noun) shall not be your master” (Rom 6:14). Sin can’t control you because you have the mind of Christ.

Thinking like a saint does not come naturally, one must train themselves to think that way. This is the first step to godly living. Hebrews states, “But solid food is for the mature, who *by constant use* **have trained themselves** to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14). Solid food is for the mature, who because of practice, have trained themselves to discern good and evil. You simply need to understand and begin acting and practice living like a saint. Christ will overcome the power of sin through you, for you. Simply put, we cannot make promises ourselves because we do not have the strength to

do so. We need to promise by saying, “Lord, by Your grace alone, I know You can keep my promise through me.” But by being trained to think and act like HE is working through us, the power of sin is subdued. Satan is the accuser. He gives you thoughts and then accuses you of originating them. Those thoughts are not yours unless you take them. The more we practice and train ourselves to see Christ in us as saints, the easier it becomes and the more joy-filled our life will be: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--*put it into practice*. And the God of peace will be with you” (Phil 4:9).

CAUTION! If you think that now you will keep an eye out for these lies of Satan, “take heed, lest ye fall.” Satan wants you to do that. This is putting the cart before the horse. The Bible clearly tells us “The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). If we set our mind to be tuned into sin-filled ideas of sin, Satan has you already defeated. Instead, if you set your mind on things above, sin (noun) is faced with the challenge of getting through those Godly thoughts to deliver his thoughts. The more we are trained to think in godly ways and put Christ into every part of our life, music, entertainment, work, family, etc., the more Satan’s thoughts will stick out like a sore thumb. Then you can take that thought captive, reject it, and stay on track with Christ.

Again, to say we have a sinful nature gives us an excuse to sin, but the Bible does not support that. Paul put it beautifully when he said, “In the same way, count yourselves **dead to sin** but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore *do not let sin reign in your mortal body* so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death **to life**; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom 6:11-14). Now put this Scripture to practice. All true knowledge is the outgrowth of obedience. Everything else is just information, if not acted upon.

As long as we are on a role of challenging your normal thought process, why don’t we ask you the question of where the New Testament begins? Do you realize that Jesus’ ministry took place under the LAW, not grace? Jesus came to bring a New Covenant of grace, but His ministry only led up to it, it wasn’t under it. Therefore, the four gospels are technically under law, or Old Covenant times. Pentecost will usher in the New Testament era in Acts 2. This is vital in properly understanding many portions of Scripture as recorded in the gospels.

I do believe the Bible is inspired in its entirety. However, we must also remember that things like chapter breaks and verse numberings are not inspired. Likewise, the Old/New Testament break is also man made. Luke records Jesus’ words, “In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is *poured out* for you’” (Luke 22:20). The word “covenant” and “testament” are the same Hebrew word, and therefore, Jesus tells us when the New Covenant would begin -- with the pouring out of His blood. The New Covenant could not have stood under the law any more than Moses’s basket could have stayed afloat under the law. When Jesus began His ministry He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Mat 4:17). Note that He said it was “near” not “here.” God’s Holy Spirit, which gives faith, had not yet been poured out upon the earth. Many people would give almost anything to have the chance to go back and walk with Christ as the disciples

did. Let me tell you, this is nothing to wish for, because you would have been just as blind as they were without the outpouring of the Spirit. We now live in an era much greater than the disciples, and I believe that Scripture will also show this.

To illustrate that Jesus' ministry was under the law, I would like to point out only a small portion of many examples. You can read the gospels and find the rest yourself, however, do not take me as saying that the gospels are not important. They are just as important as the rest of the law and prophets that testify of Christ. They also have grace mixed with their law. However, once the gospels are over, the New Covenant is ushered in and grace abounds. Let us compare Matthew, who recorded Jesus' words, "For **if** you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But **if you do not** forgive men their sins, your Father will *not* forgive your sins" (Mat 6:14-15). Do you see how Christ's ministry was under law? Does this sound like the Gospel you learned about: *If* you forgive, Christ's death is effective, if not, it isn't either? Now look what happens after the New Covenant is ushered in, "**When** you were *dead in your sins* and in the uncircumcision of your sinful [flesh, *sarx*], God *made you alive with Christ*. He *forgave us all our sins*, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that **was against us** and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14). Now we are forgiven by faith, not by our performance. The Bible isn't contradicting itself here, it simply is recording history under two types of covenants. Jesus' entire ministry was trying to bring people to repentance and leave them no place to look but the cross. He was showing them over and over that the law was death for them, and there was no way out except the cross. Look at Matthew 15 when Jesus talked to the Gentile woman and refused to give her gospel (at first): "He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs'" (Mat 15:26). Would any of us say that to someone who was willing to receive Christ today? During Old Covenant times, the gospel was for the Jews only. That is why Christ came, to open the doors for all believers, but that time had not yet come here in Matthew. In Matthew 5 we read, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mat 5:6). To be righteous means to be perfect. Once we go past Pentecost we then read, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). In the very next verse of Matthew we read, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Mat 5:7). Again, if I don't show mercy to someone, I, myself, will not be given mercy. I sure hope that I have shown enough to receive enough! But what happens after Pentecost: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great *mercy* He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). Praise God that He gave us mercy without any merit of our own. Matthew continues, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Mat 5:9). But Galatians shows we are already sons of God, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26). Finally, Matthew culminates the point of his message by saying, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Mat 5:20-22). Note

the present tense form of those verbs. Now who could stand under that? Jesus was simply leading them up to the point where He could show the people their utter despair, and their need for Him. Later Jesus would throw them a life-raft in the words, "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). This sermon was not for us today, it was for those people under the Old Covenant. That is why Jesus said, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny" (Mat 5:25-26). People, Jesus wasn't talking about civil court matters here, that Judge was Christ. Jesus clearly showed them that the only way to heaven under their current system was to, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat 5:48). They must have walked away from that sermon wondering if there was any hope. To be perfect meant to be blameless. God provided that hope on the cross and then stated, "We proclaim *Him*, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may *present everyone perfect in Christ*" (Col 1:28).

This does not mean that the law is bad, and, that it has no purpose today for unbelievers and those that stray. As Timothy states, "We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels" (1 Tim 1:8-9). Hebrews tells us the law is written in our minds (Heb 10:16). But what is that for us as Christians? Romans tell us, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman *has fulfilled the law*. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'. Love does no harm to its neighbor. *Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law*" (Rom 13:8-10). Jesus said there were two main laws: 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and 2) Love your neighbor as yourself. Then He said, "All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mat 22:40). Today, we are under the law of love.

I believe this whole topic is more clear when we also look at the twelve apostles. Which twelve? THE twelve! When Judas hung himself (before Pentecost), Peter decided to replace him, so, they cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias. Isn't it interesting that this is the only time we ever hear the name Matthias. We know nothing about him, his family or his ministry. Not another word was said, and he is never mentioned by anyone again. Why? Well, one thing we know about Peter is that he was always running ahead of the game and doing things his way. I tend to believe it was Peter's idea to replace Judas then, not God's. Matthias was man's choice. They narrowed the choices down and then cast lots even before the Holy Spirit had been given. But I think God's choice was Paul. Look what God said of Paul, "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is **My chosen instrument** to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). After all, Paul is afterward called an apostle over 17 times, yet we never hear of Matthias again. And what a choice God made. Isn't it interesting that we know for certain that Paul wrote at least 13 of the 23 New Testament books (after John). When we examine the life of Paul, I believe there is a good reason for this.

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul wrote, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--was caught up to *paradise*. He heard *inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell*” (2 Cor 12:2-4). Later we see that this man is Paul and he, perhaps out of humility, used third person language to describe himself. Have you ever wondered what Lazarus experienced after being brought back from the dead? I have! Well, perhaps Paul could tell you. It is interesting that if we go back 14 years to when Paul said this happened, guess where Paul is? Lystra! It is very possible that Paul was dead and brought back to life and during that period experienced what he mentioned in Corinthians. In Lystra this happened to Paul: “Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, *thinking he was dead*. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The *next day* he and Barnabas left for Derbe” (Acts 14:19-20). Let me tell you, these Jews were not throwing pebbles at Paul, but baseball size and larger stones. These Jews weren’t just a little upset either, they were indignant. They even drug him out of the city after he was supposed to be dead. The disciples gathered or “stood” around him and, according to the text, did nothing. I don’t know if you have ever been hurt or banged up before, but one thing I can tell you, you aren’t going anywhere fast (if at all) the next day. Paul then “got up” or “rose,” before going back to his killers. Can you imagine what the stoners must have thought? Paul then went 30 miles to Derbe the very next day. Again, I can’t say for sure, but I think Paul was raised from the dead like Eutychus was (Acts 20:9). After all, Paul was God’s chosen servant.

We also see that Paul was the only disciple personally tutored by Christ after the cross, and even this was “one on one” out in the Arabian desert. Fourteen years later Paul was called to preach the “true faith” (1 Tim 2:7) to the Gentiles. Paul even admits that his knowledge (that he received from the ASCENDED Lord) did not come from the other apostles. In fact, Paul even says, “those men added nothing to my message” (Gal 2:6). Paul had a unique experience that none of the other apostles had: he had been taught openly (not in parables) by the ascended Christ. Add to this as well, that Paul was listening and seeing with open eyes and ears. When the disciples were with Jesus they were continually asking Him to repeat and explain, and even then, they still did not understand. After the Holy Spirit came, however, their eyes were opened and they were, for the most part (not completely), left to recall what Christ had said. Paul had the Holy Spirit and was taught not by the disciples, but by Christ. In fact, three years go by before he even meets the disciples in Jerusalem, and even then he did not see them all. When Paul had his revelation where he was “caught up” to paradise he heard words that were not allowed to be shared yet. Bill Gillham has written a fantastic book called, *What God Wishes Christians knew about Christianity*. Much of what we have been talking about in this “saint or sinner” section has come from his book. He writes, “Could it be that God commanded Paul to share the secret revelation to the churches before his martyrdom? I’m speculating that this may be the case because Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians have much to say about the glorious truths of our identity in Christ. The first four chapters of Ephesians, as well as many verses in Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians, address this. On the other hand, this topic is treated much more lightly, if at all, in Paul’s earlier writings (1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans). The fact that

no other New Testament scribes record the truths of our new identity in Christ this extensively makes me suspect that they were revealed more completely to Paul. . . . Sometimes it can get lonely at the top. This is especially true when you feel like you're the only one who is saying or doing something a particular way and you are encountering opposition from those who are ostensibly reading from the same page as you. Did Paul begin to have some doubts about whether his message needed some tweaking? Perhaps so. Human reinforcement is encouraging. God designed the body of Christ this way. The Scriptures say, 'Then after an interval of fourteen years I [Paul] went up again to Jerusalem. . . . And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain (Gal 2:1-2)'" (pp. 166-167). Paul wrote, "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the Old Covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away" (2 Cor 3:14). Perhaps Paul was "better versed" in the deeper truths of Scripture, because he was trained when that veil was completely removed. The other 11 disciples had been trained by Christ during His ministry under the law. So when we review Paul's life, we see he was converted, spent three years with Jesus in the desert, went and saw Peter and James, then 14 years later went to the Gentiles. But during these times, Paul was able to say that the apostles contributed nothing to his message (Gal 2:6). This, plus his "revelation," may have meant that God had given Paul a message that unveiled the Gospel, not only to the Gentiles, but to the whole world.

Even the other disciples took note of Paul's message saying, "He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain *some things that are hard to understand*, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:16). Peter shows us that Paul's teachings were hard to understand, but more importantly, if one does not take note of them or distorts them, it is to their own demise. We become unstable and ignorant in all of scripture because Paul's truth is foundational for your Christian identity as a saint.