Believers: Sinners or Saints?

"The one who defines the terms wins the argument." This statement is certainly accurate in our day. We are living at a time in America when important terms are being redefined, and those who are doing the redefining appear to be winning the argument. Take for example the terms "marriage" and "gender". Both of these terms have been redefined so that they now include "same-sex marriage" and "transgender." Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as "same-sex marriage" or one who is "transgender."

God created male and female according to Genesis 1:27. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." For Christians to even use the terms "same-sex marriage" and "transgender" is only to advance the cause of such ideas. Instead, Christians should stand firm on the Word of God and refuse even to acknowledge such terminology. When two men or two women receive a license to unite together is not marriage, it is immorality. As believers, we should not even use the term in the same way the world does when God has put a clear definition on the term.

Regardless of what the Supreme Court and our society decide, marriage remains between one man and one woman. A person's gender is determined at birth, male or female, not based upon how a person identifies themself. These are important issues in our day, and we must stand boldly for the truth that God has clearly made known in His Word. The prophet Isaiah gives a severe warning to those who would redefine words and call what is "evil," "good." The Prophet writes in **Isaiah 5:20**, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

When it comes to our society and our government, many believers are willing to stand firmly for the truth of God's Word. They are not willing to compromise the meaning of such terms because they see plainly that to do so is to begin the slippery slope downward. However, when it comes to Biblical issues and the definition of terms, many of these same believers are not consistent. Instead, even without knowing it, they have yielded to the practice of "redefining terms." In these cases, it is not the Supreme Court that wants to change the meaning of the term. Many true believers themselves are redefining some very important Biblical terms. This booklet will examine two of these terms, sinners and saints.

As Christians, we should always stand for the Word of God, taken in context, on any given issue. This means that even if "great" Christians of the past have held to a view contrary to the Bible, we must still stand for the Bible. Certainly, this can be hard at times. To speak and believe contrary to respected Christians of days gone by can be a dangerous thing. We must approach such issues carefully and recognize that there is "no new thing under the sun" (**Ecclesiastes 1:9**). Anytime we think we have come up with what might be a "new" doctrine, we should be extremely cautious as we examine it in light of God's Word.

We must also be willing to look carefully to see if what is considered a "new" doctrine has simply been denied so long that it appears to be new. Is it possible that a Bible truth held by believers in the past has been changed for so long that it now appears to be new?

For example, take the word "sinner." Most people today, both in our society as well as in the churches, will define a "sinner" as "one who sins." But is this the proper definition? Have you ever really looked into the word to see what it actually means according to its use in the Bible?

DEFINITION OF "SINNER"

If you go to one of the online dictionaries such as www.dictionary.com, the definition of a sinner is "a person who sins." The question we have to ask is whether that definition lines up with what the word means in the context of the Bible. Is that what the term means in its Biblical context? These are questions worth examining if we want to be accurate in our terminology as well as in our understanding of God's Word.

Consider the definition of sinner from Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary. Webster's 1828 dictionary often uses Biblical examples and verses for its definitions. Under the word "sinner," we see this definition:

> "It is used in contradistinction to saint, to denote an unregenerate person; one who has not received pardon of his sins."

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines sinner as follows:

1) Devoted to sin, a sinner
1a) not free from sin
1b) pre-eminently sinful, especially wicked

The <u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u> defines a sinner with these words:

> The sinner is the man who does not allow God supreme authority over his life and who withholds from Him total dedication and obedience…

The <u>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</u> lists the word for "sinner" as the Greek word "hamartolos," which means "devoted to sin" or "erring one."

According to the <u>Dictionary of Bible Themes</u>, "The term tends to be used in particular of those regarded as outside God's covenant of grace, whose sins are therefore not forgiven."

John MacArthur, a well-known pastor and author, in his Study Bible notes on **James 4:8** (…cleanse your hands you sinners), says this regarding the word sinners: "A term used only for unbelievers."

In his sermon <u>Drawing Near To God</u> from James 4:7-10, MacArthur says this regarding the word sinner:

> They are specifically labeled as sinners. Now, how could that possibly be a description of a Christian? There's no way. And yet I am amazed - I read about 15 commentaries this week, not one of them said this passage was directed to unbelievers.
>
> One commentator who's usually the most lucid in James says, "Every use of the word hamartloi" - sinners - "in the New Testament refers to unbelievers except this one." Period, paragraph, with no explanation, he said that.
>
> Why do you say that? Why does this have to be to believers? It can't be. And yet we've lost this great invitation because for some reason it's been interpreted that this is directed at Christians.
>
> Let's look at the word "sinners." You see it there in verse 8? "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." Let me do a little bit of a study of that word for you just so you get your feet on the ground as to who he's talking about if you still have any doubts. The word hamartloi, the word for sinners, is used in the gospels, and not only in the gospels, but it's used predominantly in the gospels of the New Testament to refer

to the hardened sinner, the one who openly disregards the law of God, the one who had a reputation for public immorality.

Again, in his Study Bible notes on **James 5:20**, MacArthur states this regarding the term sinner: "A word used to describe the unregenerate." He goes on to say in his commentary, "In the New Testament the term sinner invariably describes those outside the kingdom of God." He also says, "A sinner, then, is someone who is without God and Christ, and so in need of salvation; it is a word of characterization."

MacArthur is very clear concerning the meaning of the word sinner. There is no uncertainty regarding who is a sinner in his definition. More importantly, the Biblical definition (as seen above) is equally clear. How is it then that many believers have denied what is clearly taught by the meaning of the word sinner? Why is it that believers still call themselves "sinners saved by grace" when this phrase is never used in the Bible?

BIBLICAL CONTEXT OF THE WORD "SINNER"

We recognize that we don't base our understanding of the Bible solely on the definition of words. We must always be careful to understand the context of words and verses as well. The context includes not only the chapter, but the whole book, as well as the entire Bible.

To ensure we understand what the word "sinner" actually means, consider the following. The word "sinner" is used 21 times in the Bible and the word "sinners" is used 46 times. Below are a few of the references to help us understand how the word is used in the Bible.

> **Psalm 1:1** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

> **Psalm 104:35** Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!

> **Proverbs 23:17** Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.

> **Luke 15:1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

John 9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

Hebrews 7:26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

1Peter 4:18 If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

These verses are just a small sampling to demonstrate how the word "sinner" is used in the Bible. An interesting note as you review these verses is the similarity between the word "sinner" and the words "wicked" or "ungodly". Throughout the Old and New Testament, these words are often used together to describe that class of people who are not genuine believers in God or Christ, but rather, the wicked and unregenerate.

In the book of Proverbs, the words "sinner" or "sinners" are contrasted with the word "righteous," showing once again that "sinners" is a description of an unbeliever, not a believer. Examine the following verses:

Proverbs11:31 If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!

Proverbs 13:21 Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.

According to the Bible, there are only two groups of people in the world, those who are Christians and those who are not. We might refer to these two groups in various ways, such as the righteous and the wicked, the wise man and the fool, believers and unbelievers.

In **Romans 6**, we see these two groups of people described with these terms, those who are "slaves of sin," and those who, having been set free from sin, are now "slaves to righteousness." Those are the only two groups of people in the world. You are either a "sinner" (a slave to sin) or a "saint" (a slave to righteousness). There are no other groups!

BELIEVERS ARE CALLED "SAINTS"

In contrast to "sinner" in the Bible, the word to describe a true believer in both the Old and New Testament is the word "saint." The word "saint" is

taken from the Greek word "hagios" which means "holy" or "consecrated." The word describes someone or something that is holy or consecrated, or "set apart" from that which is common or ordinary. For example, we call the Bible a "Holy Bible" because it is unlike any common book. Jerusalem is called the "Holy City" because it is distinguished by God from all other cities. In like manner, Old Testament believers and New Testament Christians are called "saints" throughout the Bible. In fact, the words "saint" or "saints" are used 82 times in the Bible. Consider the following uses:

> **Psalm 16:15** Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

> **Psalm 145:10** All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!

> **Romans 1:7** To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

> **Philemon 1:5** ...because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints...

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines "saint" as a "most holy thing." According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, a saint is "one separated from the world and consecrated to God; one holy by profession and by covenant; a believer in Christ."

The Bible is clear that a believer is a saint, not because of any works or merit of their own, but only because of Jesus Christ. To clarify then, a saint is what God calls those who are genuine believers in Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. This is an important distinction made in the Bible between a sinner and a saint. A distinction God makes is not something that we should overlook when describing a believer.

Let us now consider some verses from the Bible that show this teaching even more clearly. Consider the following passages from the book of Romans.

> **Romans 5:6** For *while we were still weak*, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

> **Romans 5:10** For if *while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

> **Romans 7:5-6** For *while we were living in the flesh*, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

What we notice in these three verses is that before a person becomes a Christian they are "weak," they are "enemies," and they are "living in the flesh." However, once they became Christians, they are changed. Christians are no longer weak; they are strong through Christ. They are no longer enemies; they are reconciled to God by the life of Christ. They are no longer living in the flesh; they are released from the law, having died to that which held them captive.

Consider now one final verse, taken from the same context as the verses above.

> **Romans 5:8** but God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us.

Notice that the same exact phrase is used in each of the four verses listed above, "while we were." It is a description of what every Christian used to be, before being "born again" by the Holy Spirit. We were weak, we were sinners, we were enemies, and we were living in the flesh. However, after salvation, Christians are no longer weak; they are strong in Christ. They are no longer sinners; they are saints. They are no longer enemies; they are reconciled to God. They are no longer living in the flesh; they are living in the Spirit.

Praise God for this wonderful transformation! No wonder the Apostle Paul declares in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

If God's Word makes it plain that we are no longer enemies of God, would a Christian ever want to refer to himself in the present as "an enemy of God" any longer? If you heard a Christian describe himself by saying, "I *am* an enemy of God saved by grace," you would be confused. One might say, "I *was* an enemy of God, but now I *am* saved by grace." Likewise, for a Christian to say, "I *am only* a sinner saved by grace" is an incorrect statement. Biblically speaking a Christian could say, "I *was* a sinner, but now I *am* a saint saved by grace." Such a statement exalts the work of Christ in the life of the believer.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

An important point to consider in this matter is the background regarding how the definition changed through the years. According to the book <u>Church History</u>, written by Bruce L. Shelley, during the 3rd century there arose a division between two prominent men, Novatian and Cornelius.

Novatian, known as an "anti-pope," defended the primitive concept that the church was to be considered a "society of saints." Cornelius, who was elected as pope in 251, advocated a new view that considered the church as a "school for sinners." This view became the popular view and was adhered to by those who followed pope Cornelius.

"Novatianists built up a network of small congregations that considered the catholic churches polluted as a result of their lenient attitude toward sinners" (p.82).

Even today, the Roman Catholic church views saints as only those whom they declare saints after their death. To hold that a believer is still a sinner is a very Roman Catholic teaching and should be rejected by all who believe the Bible. Many who decry Roman Catholicism continue to adhere to one of their firmly held teachings.

AN OBJECTION TO THIS VIEW

While various reasons have been presented to show that believers are not sinners, it is important to consider any verses that appear to differ with this teaching. The most commonly used objection to this teaching is found in **1 Timothy 1:15** where the Apostle Paul calls himself the "chief" of sinners (KJV) or the "foremost" of sinners (ESV).

The argument is made that Paul states this of himself using the present tense in the Greek, "I am," not "I was." At first glance, this seems like a valid argument. However, as we must always do when studying the Scriptures, we should examine the context surrounding verse 15. Consider **1 Timothy 1:12-16**:

> And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This *is* a faithful saying, and

worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (KJV).

In examining the context, we find that Paul is magnifying the grace of God to save one so evil as himself before he believed in Jesus Christ. By saving Paul, Jesus' power to save is magnified because Paul considers himself before His conversion as "chief" or "foremost" of sinners. The Greek word translated "chief" or "foremost" is "protos," which means "first in time or place." The word "protos" is the root from which we get the word "prototype." A prototype is defined as "an original or model after which anything is formed," "someone or something that serves as a model or inspiration for those that come later."

Paul set himself forth in the passage as the "prototype" of sinners, the model of those whom Christ came to save. In saving Paul, Jesus showed his patience toward Paul and now is setting him forth as a "pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (v. 16).

John MacArthur comments on **1 Timothy 1:16** with these words:

> A model or example. Paul was living proof that God could save any sinner, no matter how great a one he might be.

Matthew Henry comments on this verse:

> The chief of sinners may become the chief of saints; so this apostle was, for he was not a whit behind the very chief apostles (**2 Cor. 11:5**), for Christ came to save the chief of sinners. It deserves to be received, to be believed by us all, for our comfort and encouragement. The mercy which Paul found with God, notwithstanding his great wickedness before his conversion, he speaks of, for the encouragement of others to repent and believe (v. 16). ...It was an instance of the long-suffering of Christ that he would bear so much with one who had been so very provoking; and it was designed for a pattern to all others, that the greatest sinners might not despair of mercy with God. Note here, First, our apostle was one of the first great sinners converted to Christianity. Secondly, He was converted, and obtained mercy, for the sake of others as well as of himself; he was a pattern to others. Thirdly, The Lord

> Jesus Christ shows great long-suffering in the conversion of great sinners.

Paul, by using the present tense, is showing that he will always be the "pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." This would account for why Paul is using the present tense to describe himself as the "first" or "foremost." This is quite different than saying that Paul remained the worst of sinners, even after his conversion. To do so, misses the point that Paul is making in the text, that he is and always will be the example of how great a sinner Christ can save.

Consider what Paul said in **I Corinthians 15:9-10**:

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

Notice that Paul says he is the "least of the apostles" and "unworthy to be called an apostle." But look at the context of these phrases. He goes on to say it is "because I persecuted the church of God." Paul's descriptions of himself are again given in the context of his life before conversion. Notice how Paul describes himself in other letters to the churches. For example, in **2 Corinthians 11:5** Paul says:

> For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. (NKJV)

Again, in **2 Corinthians 12:11-12**, Paul describes himself in this way:

> I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you; for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. (KJV)

There is no doubt Paul was a humble man. He thought of himself as undeserving to be an Apostle because of his former persecution of the church. But we also know that Paul wrote to the Roman believers and explained that as Christians we are no longer "slaves of sin" (**Romans 6:17**). If Paul was presently the worst sinner of all men, then was he a "slave of sin"?

Consider these words from James Shelley, author of <u>Clinging to a Counterfeit Cross.</u> In chapter 10, "Saint or Sinner," Shelley says:

> Many have argued that since Paul is speaking in the present tense he is humbly speaking of himself at the time. But is this what Paul is actually saying in this text? Are we to believe that Paul, by using the term "chief of sinners" was actually claiming that he saw himself, at the present time, as the most sinful man among all men? A greater sinner than Nero who was notorious for his despicable behavior? Did he see himself more sinful than any man in all of Rome, or even those Jews who took part in the death of Christ? A man walking in the Spirit more sinful than these at the present time! If this was his meaning his statement would not be one of humility but of lunacy. In truth, it would be an insult to the Spirit of God and a mockery of His inward work in the believer. No, he was certainly not claiming that he perceived himself, at the present time, a greater sinner than all other men, but he was, as the context reveals, referring to his past (v.13) before conversion. *"...although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."* Paul's main point is found in v. 16 *"...I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ might show all longsuffering **as a pattern to those who are going to believe in Him** for everlasting life*." (emphasis added). In other words, if Christ would be so merciful to save Paul, a persecutor of the Church, a blasphemer, an insolent man, the chief of sinners, he would be merciful to any man who turns to Him by faith. Paul is, in the present tense, the "chief of sinners" in that he ever remains the chief example of how exceedingly gracious God is in the salvation of the repentant sinner irrespective of his past.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

One very important rule of Bible interpretation is that we should never base a major teaching of Scripture on one verse of the Bible. Can those who claim Paul is still the worst sinner in the world point to any other verse in the Bible to verify this claim?

Some might turn to Romans 7 to further their argument. However, to do so is only to argue against Paul in Romans 6 where he stated emphatically that as believers we are "freed from sin" (**Romans 6:7**) and are "dead to sin" (**Romans 6:11**) and that "sin will have no dominion over you…" (**Romans**

6:14). In **Romans 6:18** Paul says, "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." For a fuller explanation of Romans 7, read Charles Leiter's book, Justification and Regeneration.

The beautiful and freeing truth of the whole Bible is that Christians, who were born in sin like all mankind and dead in trespasses and sin, were rescued from that sin by Jesus Christ. By His great love and grace, Christians have been saved from sin. Jesus did exactly what the angel who appeared to Joseph said Jesus would do in **Matthew 1:21**. "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people form their sins."

Why would Christians want to call themselves or other Christians "sinners" when the Bible consistently calls them "saints"? To do so is really an insult to the work of Christ. Many who do this are sincere and have simply never studied the subject for themselves. This article is not intended to condemn, but rather, to instruct and to challenge every Christian to examine these matters for themself.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Why is this truth so important? Consider a few of these reasons.

1) It is important that all of our terminology and our theology agree with God and His Word. Regardless of our traditions, we must speak about things as God speaks about them. Calling a Christian a "sinner" is never what God calls a Christian. Regardless of whether we add the phrase "saved by grace" at the end of the word "sinner," we are still speaking contrary to God's Word because we do not find such a phrase or concept in the Bible. Consider again what the prophet Isaiah wrote:

> **Isaiah 5:20 -** Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

As we have seen, a "saint" is a believer, and a "sinner" is an unbeliever. Why would we want to call a believer by a description other than what God designed us to use?

2) Another reason it is important to call believers "saints" is that is removes the confusion so evident all around us. Many unbelievers will readily admit they are sinners, but then often follow up with the phrase, "but everyone is a sinner." They do this to justify their sin and to show that they are no worse than anyone else. By explaining that we are all sinners, enslaved to sin, when

we are born into this world, we can then go on to show that through Christ, Christians have been born again and thereby are no longer slaves to sin (sinners). Instead Christians are now holy, set apart to God (saints) for His service. This also gives an opportunity to explain the new birth and how Christians are a "new creation" in Christ, set free from sin's power and dominion. This truly is the "good news" of Jesus Christ that is available to all who believe.

This is consistent with the words of Paul when he says in **Romans 6:17-18**:

> But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Jesus taught this very truth in **John 8:32** when he said, "and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

3) A third reason this truth is important is because as human beings we act according to our beliefs. If a child grows up continually hearing from his parents he is unable to accomplish anything, he will inevitably act in line with that way of thinking. An employee who continually hears that he is useless and can't get anything right will most likely *not* become a top producer.

Likewise, when Christians are led to believe that they are just "sinners," they often begin to excuse their sin and justify their sinful behavior. After all, they reason, "we are all sinners." Just as teachers are expected to teach, singers are expected to sing, and runners are expected to run, so sinners are expected to sin. That is what we expect from them.

4) The most important reason to speak rightly on this subject may be this. God's Word is clear when speaking of believers and unbelievers. It is only our traditions that cause us to speak differently from what God's Word has to say.

Will you adhere to what God's Word teaches, or will you continue to promote a teaching that is contrary to God's perfect Word?

A NEED FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Whenever we are presented with a teaching from the Word of God, our practice should always be to search the Scriptures for ourselves and not take someone else's word on it. That is why every reader is encouraged to make this study their own. Read every verse in the Bible that mentions sinner,

sinners, saint, and saints. This can be easily done with the use of a Bible program on a computer or phone, or it can be done using a Bible concordance. Search the meaning of the words and look at their context. Consider the whole of Scripture to see if this teaching is in accordance with what we know about what happens when a person is "born again."

Sadly, many who call themselves Christians today rarely study the Word of God. Instead, they have grown accustomed to believing what they have been told about the Bible. Most churches have a doctrinal statement or statement of beliefs that they endorse. Often, the members of these churches state they agree with such statements without ever having studied for themselves the very teachings they claim to believe. Ask yourself, "Have I ever really studied the Bible on this subject, and could I give solid biblical proof to show that every Christian is still a sinner?" If not, you most likely have simply believed what you were taught, rather than basing your belief on your own understanding of God's Word.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In closing, consider a few more uses of the word "sinner" in the Bible.

In John 9, we have the story of the man born blind. After being healed of his blindness he is brought before the Pharisees. Consider his words, words that are consistent with the entire Bible. After the Pharisees called Jesus a sinner, the formerly blind man says to them in **John 9:30-31**:

> Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

Again, consider **Hebrews 7:25-26**, as the author of Hebrews writes concerning Jesus Christ:

> Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Again, give careful attention to **1 Peter 4:17**:

> For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Even the Psalmist understood the end of "sinners," whom he also calls "wicked" in **Psalm 104:35**:

> Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more! Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!

For believers to refer to themselves as "saints" is not a proud statement. Rather, it magnifies the grace of God through Christ to rescue one who was previously a sinner. It gives glory to the person and work of Jesus Christ who "saves his people from their sin." It is also consistent with what Paul wrote in **Romans 12:3**:

> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The purpose of this booklet is fourfold:

1) To magnify the work of Christ and His shed bled in rescuing sinners from sin and transforming them into saints. He did this by His grace to "…redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (**Titus 2:14**)."

2) To encourage believers to speak more Biblically in all their discussions. Since words are so important as we share the gospel with others, it is essential that we speak consistent with Biblical truth. Rather than using catchy phrases not founded in the Bible, like "sinners saved by grace", we should speak Biblically and call things what God calls them. Since the Bible is so clear on this subject, we should call believers "saints."

3) To encourage believers to examine their beliefs very diligently to make sure they measure up to God's Word. Most Christians recognize the lack of Biblical understanding in the church today. This is due to a lack of diligent study of God's Word on an individual basis. As Christians, it is crucial we

carefully examine God's Word to make sure what we believe is consistent with the Word of God. By so doing, we are demonstrating true humility.

4) To encourage Christians to live more holy lives consistent with their "identity in Christ." When we see what God has done for us, it will be a motivator to want to live for Him. Christ is our example and his attitude toward sin should be ours. There should never be an excuse for our sin since the Bible teaches us that we have been given everything necessary for "life and godliness." As saints, we are to live out our true identity in Christ.

In teaching that believers are not sinners, that is not to say that believers do not sin. To teach that would be to contradict the Apostle John in **1 John 1:8,** "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Sadly, believers do sin. To deny this is to reject the clear teaching of the Bible. A believer who sins is quite different from a person who is enslaved to sin. Paul wrote to the believers in the churches urging them on to holiness and the forsaking of sin. To sin, however, is inconsistent with who we are as believers. When we view ourselves as saints, we are acknowledging the work of Christ in us.

John the Apostle wrote to the believers in **1 John 2:1**, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. When a believer sins, there is cleansing through Jesus Christ.

For too long many believers have made excuses for sin without realizing it. The teaching that believers are sinners has only further excused sin. May we return to the Biblical truth of who we are in Christ as saints and walk as holy ones.

What will you do with this teaching? Will you be like the Bereans who examined "the Scriptures daily" (**Acts 17:11**) to see if what they were being taught was true? Or will you go on continuing to speak contrary to God's Word by describing yourself as "only a sinner saved by grace." By referring to yourself as a "sinner" you minimize the work of Christ in your life. Exalt the Lord Jesus and give him the glory as you humbly acknowledge his work of changing you from a "sinner" into a "saint."

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (**Ephesians 3:20-21**)