

Both Sinner and Saint (Part 2)
The 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation (October 31, 1517)
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Today is October 29, 2017. Tuesday is, yes, Halloween, but more importantly the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a young priest, attached his 95 Theses (or statements) to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, challenging the church of his day to return to the teaching of the Bible and true Christianity.

Now, I believe this time period is the most fascinating period in history since the time of the New Testament church, which was almost 2000 years ago. Yet, I realize many of you in this room are not really “into history.” You are trying to keep track of what happened the past five days. You don’t have time to think about 500 years ago. Yet, some of the things Luther did, specifically what he taught, have a huge impact on your life as a Christian today.

For one thing, the Protestant Reformation did not stay in Germany, but spread to Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and then Scotland and England. Some of those folks who embraced Reformation teachings began to call themselves Baptists. And eventually, those Baptists started taking ships across the ocean to “The New World.” And through a path which has all sorts of twists and turns, here we are at Chisholm Baptist Church on October 29, in the year of our Lord 2017.

Some of you, like my wife Nancy, grew up going to a “Lutheran” church. Others of you have maybe never set foot in such a place. But, if you are a Bible believing follower of Jesus, an Evangelical Christian, you have Lutheran DNA in your spiritual ancestry. Oh, there is probably a little Anabaptist DNA too, but we have been impacted in a very positive way by what happened in Germany 500 years ago.

This past January, we did a month-long series on the Five Solas of the Reformation, which focused on the main teachings of Reformation Christianity. These doctrines have far more impact on our lives than history lessons or church denominations.

These teachings include:

- The Bible Alone as our Authority
- Salvation is by Grace Alone
- Through Faith Alone
- In Christ Alone
- For the Glory of God Alone

Those sermons are available on our website.

Last Sunday, we focused on something else Martin Luther taught which I think is also very important:

“Simul Justus et Peccator”

Or in English, “Simultaneously Righteous and Sinner.” In other words, as a believer in Jesus, I am both a saint and a sinner at the same time. This teaching is rooted in the Reformation teaching of “Justification by Faith Alone.” We, those of us trusting in Jesus Christ to save us, are already saints. The righteousness of Jesus Christ, His perfect score is counted as our own. That is true today, tomorrow and in all the days ahead. As a Christian, I am always considered righteous, always a beloved child of God, because of Jesus Christ and what He has done for me.

At the same time, as a Christian, even with the perfect score of Jesus beside my name, I am still a sinner. Even though, by God’s grace, I likely sin less than I did before, in my very nature there is still a desire to love myself more than God. Any person with that desire is a sinner. Even if he/she is not committing a particular sinful act at that time.

We also noted that the idea of a Christian being a saint and sinner at the same time stands in contrast to the view that Christians are on a continuum, gradually moving from sinner to saint. Thus, many say, we are neither fully sinner nor fully saint, but something in between. That is the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, but I think it is also a common understanding among Christians in all types of churches, including ours. That is unfortunate. I believe there is great, practical, spiritual benefit in knowing I am both a sinner and saint at the same time.

We will spend the rest of our time this morning exploring what that involves. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear, understand, believe and obey His word today.

Why is it so helpful to believe I am both a saint and sinner at the same time?

#1) It is good to know we are already and will always be saints.

In the Bible, a saint does not refer to an extremely devout individual, or to someone specially honored by the church, but to any Christian who has been justified, declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. Not only are your sins forgiven, but Jesus' perfect score is counted as your own. As a result, these statements by the Apostle Paul apply to you:

Romans 8:1 – “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” And **Romans 8:39** – “Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Friends, that type of clear assurance is very encouraging for those who struggle in various aspects of life.

Maybe you are someone dealing with an addiction, a sinful habit such as porn, alcohol or chemical abuse, using profanity or spending way too much money on lottery tickets. You know you should not do those things, and when you do, you feel *so guilty*. You want to follow Jesus. You want to do the right thing, but you often seem to mess up. Friend, how magnificent it is to know that if you are a believer in Jesus, when you mess up, God sees and treats you, not as a rebellious sinner, but as His beloved child who is just straying from the path.

Or maybe, like me, your sinful habits don't involve any of those types of things. Instead, you have a habit of being selfish with your time or money, of holding a grudge against someone who has wronged you, of looking down at people who you don't think are as “good as you” or of having the habit of letting other people know about their flaws or maybe someone else's.

Friend, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you should hate those types of actions and attitudes. And when you become aware you still do or think those types of things, it can be pretty discouraging until you realize there is no condemnation, nothing that can separate you from God's love, if you are trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior. As Luther said, “It is great to know that all my sins are on Jesus' shoulders, not mine.”

There is also great encouragement here for a Christian who struggles with doubt. Friends, there is nothing

easy about faith in the 21st century. We live in a secular age where our faith in the Lord Jesus is constantly challenged. As author Christian Smith says, “We don't believe instead of doubting; we believe while doubting. We are all Thomases now.”

Friends, remember doubt is not sin; it is temptation, a temptation to unbelief, which is sin. Though some of you are not tempted in that way, many of us are. Sometimes we struggle with thoughts like, “God, if You really loved me, how could You let this person die?” Or, “How do I know that the Bible is true when my professor at college says it is a bunch of fairy tales?”

Yet, when doubt seeps into our minds or hearts, there is something very encouraging about hearing those words, words from God: “There is no condemnation. Nothing will ever separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Friends, Romans 8 is, I think, the most encouraging chapter in the Bible. It is worth memorizing the whole thing. Yet, if you don't do that, I would encourage you to make sure you know the first and last verses. **Romans 8:1** – “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” And **Romans 8:39** – “Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” It is great to know we are already saints.

#2) It is also good to know that we are still sinners.

Yes, we still commit sins, but more importantly, we are still by nature sinners whose hearts are divided between being a lover of God and a lover of self. What could possibly be good about this situation?

Well, it makes us aware of our need for God's grace. If we no longer see ourselves as sinners, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking we can somehow make it on our own, that we don't really have to depend on the Lord.

Author Paul Tripp puts it this way:

Seeing yourself as hopeless and helpless if left to yourself, initiates and ignites your pursuit of God's grace. The fact is that we all give daily evidence of our continuing need for grace. Simply put, we have no ability to make it on our own. We still stand in desperate need of divine help. Are you willing to admit that and run to where grace can be found?

And friends, when we run to where that grace can be found and experience that fully, it is a wonderful thing!

Yet, there is often a temptation to take that grace for granted, thinking that now, as a child of God, anything we do somehow has God's stamp of approval. In some cases it can harden our conscience and allow us to justify self-righteous, Pharisaical attitudes.

I think of my friend, Joe. The other day he called the police because his neighbor, Jim, was parked in the alley, so Joe had to drive around the block to get out when he came to church.

When I asked Joe if he thought he should have called the police, he said, "Of course I should have. It is illegal to park in the alley like that. Are you suggesting I did something wrong?"

Yet, I really wonder if Joe made a good choice. Yes, he had a right to do that. And yes, when there has been a history of ugly conflicts with a neighbor or you have reason to believe things could get ugly, it probably is a good idea to call the police. But, in most cases, the first step should be to *talk* to your neighbor. Not yell at your neighbor, but knock on his door and say, "Hey, Jim, is there a reason your car is parked in the alley? That makes it kind of inconvenient for me and for others."

Friends, the Lord tells us in **Romans 15:2** – **"We should help our neighbors do what is right and build them up in the Lord."**

My guess is that there is at least a 75% chance Jim would say, "Oh man, I'm sorry. I was in a hurry. I won't do that again." And I also suspect Jim is far more likely to accept Joe's invitation to come with him to church if he knocks on the door, rather than calling the police. But Joe doesn't see that. He doesn't think he did anything wrong, and he thinks I am judgmental because I questioned what he did. I am not sure, but I think if Joe remembered that he is still a sinner, it might cause him to be more willing to examine and question his attitudes and motives. Because, friends, for many of us in this room, that is where most of our sins are – not in our actions, but in our attitudes and motives. I know for me, remembering that I am still a sinner enables me to be more diligent in recognizing and fighting sin in my life. I hope that makes sense to you. If it doesn't, I would be glad to chat about it.

#3) Knowing we are already saints, but still sinners

helps us avoid ditches as we seek to follow Jesus.

I want to call your attention to two verses. The first is one I have already mentioned – **Romans 8:1** – **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."** Again, there is tremendous encouragement there for us. The second verse is **Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)** – **"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."**

That verse has a different emphasis than others we have focused on these past two weeks. It is a warning. Without holiness, you will not see the Lord. You will not be in heaven. Now, some folks claim this verse must be referring to positional holiness we have through Jesus. Because Jesus' righteousness, His perfect score, is counted as our own, all Christians are considered holy and will see the Lord.

Friends, I believe that last sentence is true, but that is not the topic of this verse. The writer says we are to make every effort – other versions say pursue – which is certainly not how we receive "positional holiness."

The topic clearly seems to be striving to live in a way which pleases the Lord. Friends, this verse is just as much God's Word as Romans 8:1. Yes, there seems to be a tension between God's promise and this warning, but we cannot ignore either.

Some of you may be thinking, "But Pastor Dan, what about eternal security, the teaching that it is impossible for a Christian to lose his/her salvation?" Well, friends, the reason I believe in eternal security is because I'm convinced that is what the Bible teaches. I don't think Hebrews 12:14 contradicts that. If we really understand what this verse means and what eternal security involves, there is no conflict.

Yes, I believe all who are truly saved will be eternally saved. Romans 8:39 reminds us that nothing will ever be able to separate a Christian, a believer in Jesus, from God's love.

The Bible also teaches that all who are truly saved will make an effort to be holy. The fact we have been regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit guarantees that.

The idea that because our salvation is secure we are then free to practice sin and be lovers of self rather than

lovers of God is not only completely absent from the Bible, but contradicts what this verse and other portions of Scripture clearly teach.

So, on the one hand, we can rest with confidence knowing that as His children, as saints, we will never be on the receiving end of God's condemnation and wrath. On the other hand, Hebrews 12:14 contains a warning that seems to indicate that unless we pursue holiness we may indeed experience God's wrath. Again, I am confident that all who have been regenerated or given life by the Holy Spirit and are indwelt by that Holy Spirit, will, to some degree, make an effort to be holy.

But I want to focus on the practical. I am not sure to what degree the Bible writers intended this, but I think the Lord wants to use verses like these to strengthen our faith and help us follow the Lord Jesus, and not grow weary as we do that. This is where avoiding the ditches comes in.

Some Christians, maybe all Christians at some point, become discouraged by their flaws and imperfections. When people struggle with overcoming sinful addictions and find themselves doing things they really don't want to do, when there are doubts about God they just can't seem to shake, when they look inside and see attitudes of selfishness, greed, lust and pride that they know should not be there, *it can be pretty frustrating.*

A lot of guilt and shame can flow into our lives. The devil can use that to push what John Bunyan, in Pilgrim's Progress calls "the slough of despond." That is where discouragement infects our soul so much that we are tempted, strongly tempted, to just throw in the towel. Forget about following Jesus. At that point, we may even decide we might as well just do whatever we feel like and focus on fulfilling our own lusts and appetites.

Friends, it is obvious that as a Christian, seeking to trust and follow Jesus, this ditch filled with frustration, guilt and shame is one which we need to avoid. So, what we need to do is post a big sign alongside this road reminding us of **Romans 8:1 – "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."**

Now, friend, if you believe in God, go to church sometimes, but are not really a believer in Jesus Christ, you have not received Him as Lord and Savior, then you are not "in Christ Jesus."

What you need to do, as God's Spirit enables, is to stop trusting in yourself, stop thinking you are good enough the way you are, and place your faith in the Lord Jesus to save you. If you are not sure what that means, or are not sure you are doing that, please talk to me later.

Only when we are in Christ, can we be free from the guilt and shame that our sin brings to our lives. Yet, if we are truly in Christ Jesus, if we are trusting in Him, then we need to remind ourselves that no matter what we have done, or how many times we have done it, there is no condemnation for us.

We have been justified, declared righteous by God. Our sins and shortcomings are already forgiven. We are already a beloved child of God, we are already a saint. Oh yes, we should feel sorrow for our sin, we should confess and repent of that sin. But, there is no reason to be discouraged.

*When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of my guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end to all my sin*

*Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me*

Friends, make sure you always keep in mind the truth of **Romans 8:1 – "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."**

At the same time, simultaneously, we need to keep in mind the truth of **Hebrews 12:14 – "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."**

Whenever we become complacent in our Christian life, whenever we start thinking our sin is no big deal, "because God will forgive us anyway," whenever we use our assurance of salvation as an excuse for not reading the Bible, spending time in prayer, or going to church, whenever we forget, "I am still a sinner," then we are getting close to a ditch on the other side of the road.

Complacency about sin indicates there is something very wrong in our soul. It is not the fruit of assurance of salvation, but a result of a very serious spiritual problem. It may even be an indication that a profession of faith is not genuine. Remember, not all who profess

faith, truly possess faith in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Hebrews 12:14 is a clear warning to stay out of the ditch, the spiritual complacency ditch, and stay focused on trusting and following the Lord Jesus.

Now, as I often say, the primary reason and motive for trusting and following Jesus is that our experience of His grace produced gratitude which leads to love, and out of love we want to please the Lord. But the Bible certainly teaches a secondary reason and motive as well. **Hebrews 12:14b – “Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”** That is a warning we should not ignore.

So friends, what side of the road are you traveling? If you are a believer in Jesus, but still feel frustrated by your own sin, discouraged by a lack of perfection in your spiritual life, you need to look at the sign that says, **Romans 8:1 – “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”** You need the encouragement that truth offers.

However, if you are someone on the other side of the road, someone who is complacent about your own sin, thinking it is no big deal, someone focused on serving yourself rather than God, then you need to look at the sign that says, **Hebrews 12:14 – “Make every effort to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”** And when that verse, that truth, sinks in and starts to feel overwhelming, we need to look again at the Romans 8:1 sign and be reminded that as God’s child, though we may sometimes experience His discipline, we will never, ever experience His wrath.

The best thing to do, of course, is to stay in the middle of the road, being aware of both signs at all times, always being confident and secure in God’s love and salvation, but never being complacent in trusting and following Jesus. In fact, that is a great goal for every day:

“Always be confident, confident in the Lord and His promises, but never complacent as we seek to honor Him each day.”