

Are We “Sinners” or “Saints”?

by

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*By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because **as He is, so also are we in this world.** 1 John 4:17 NASB (emphasis is author's)*

Among many evangelical Christians there is a strong conviction found in the oft-expressed phrase, “We are all sinners.” The context of the message, “We are all sinners”, implies that the only difference between believers and non-believers in regard to sin is that believers have been forgiven and have the assurance of an eternity in heaven. Our identity, if we relate to this message, is that we are “sinners” who have been “saved”, but still basically “sinners”.

This tradition is especially strong among traditional evangelical denominations, and, although I was not brought up in that tradition, I was saved at the age of thirty-eight in the evangelical church that my wife and I attended.

Because of the dramatic change that took place in my life when I confessed, “Jesus is Lord” and believed in my heart that God had raised Him from the dead, I fed on the word of God as one who was desperately hungry. Nor was I limited or hindered by the traditions of my denomination. I approached everything from an inductive point of view, simply believing whatever scripture, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, revealed to me.

It was in that church that I first responded to the call to teach, and I inherited a Sunday School classroom with a poster of a depressed polar bear sitting in a slouched position saying, “I’m just an old sinner saved by grace.”

I asked the class, “How many of you currently identify with this poster?”

The entire class raised their hands, and then I tore the poster off the wall and threw it into the metal trash can in the corner.

As I turned to the shocked class I said, “Then we need to look into what scripture says about who we are now in Christ, because no one in Christ is still a sinner by nature. And anyone who continues to claim that they are still sinners by nature are either unsaved or denying the finished work of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

Angry hands were raised all over the class. I had challenged their most precious tradition, and they were swarming like ground hornets. But by the end of that first class the Spirit began to give them ears to hear what scripture says about who we are in Christ.

*Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a **new creation** (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 Amplified (emphasis is the author's)*

Passed away is past tense. *Has come* is present perfect tense.

Do not misunderstand. There can be no denial by any Christian that sin still exists in the life of believers, regardless of maturity or calling.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:10 NIV

The confusion comes from not clearly defining the words, “sinner” and “saint”, and from not teaching believers the whole counsel of God about who we are now in Christ.

The Bible reveals two distinct meanings for the word, “sinner”. The first describes a man who is a slave to sin and separated from the life and covenant of God in Christ. He is a “sinner” by nature and a “sinner” by his actions. The second simply describes a man whose thoughts, words, and actions are momentarily contrary to the life and covenant of God in Christ, whether he is a believer or not. However, we are confused by the fact that not all who meet the second definition meet the first. Someone whose thoughts, words, and actions are sometimes contrary to the life and covenant of God in Christ may not be separated from the life and covenant of God, but the one who is separated from the life and covenant of God in Christ is a “sinner” by both definitions.

For the purpose of clarity in this commentary I will use “Sinner” (deliberate capital “S”) to indicate the one who is a sinner by nature (i.e. a *slave to sin*) and I will use “sinner” to indicate one who, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not a sinner by nature but is currently caught up in unconfessed, unrepentant sin.

Thinking of ourselves as being forgiven “sinners” but still essentially “Sinners” causes us to experience confusion when we are also addressed as “saints”, and when we read passages that tell us we are now *the righteousness of God in Christ*, that we are being transformed *from one degree of glory to another* by our identification with who we are now in Christ, and that we are now *participants in the divine nature* we assume that this is a kind of title that has no practical application until we are resurrected.

Are “Sinners” also “saints”? Are “Sinners” also the righteousness of God in Christ? Can “Sinners” be transformed from one degree of glory to another? Can “Sinners” participate in the divine nature?

As I researched the New Testament I could not find a single instance where believers, as a body, were addressed as “sinners” as they are today from many pulpits. They were always addressed either as “saints” or as “brothers”. Even in the case of the Corinthian man who was committing adultery with his step-mother, Paul did not refer to the man as a “sinner”. Instead, he gave the church instructions on how to bring the man to brokenness so that Satan could not outwit them.

James did refer to someone who has wandered from the truth and in danger of death, as a “sinner”, but only in terms of defining the man’s current behavior, not his true nature.

The problem here is that we assume “saint” means sinless perfection, but it does not. A saint is someone who has been sanctified and set apart for the purposes of God through regeneration. Therefore, being a “saint” includes residual sin, but it also includes the ability to overcome sin by grace through faith.

In a practical sense born again believers are still “sinners” because we continue to sin, but we experienced a profound change at the moment of saving faith that separated us instantly from who we were before that unique moment. It should be intuitive to believers that this change was not merely external, in the form of forgiveness and a future inheritance, but internal as well. And it grieves me, as it grieves the Spirit, when those who should know better, continue to teach that we are all “Sinners” and that the only difference between born again believers and the unsaved is that believers have been forgiven and are assured of an eternity in heaven.

I grant that this may not be the intent of all who use the phrase “we are all sinners”, but, because it is not taught accurately or completely, believers continue to be confused by the

paradox of believing that their condition as a “Sinner” remains unchanged although their imputed status in Christ is that of “righteousness” and of being a “saint”.

This is a little like being the Queen of England, but having no power to rule. The title is nice, but it’s purely symbolic and figurative. We believers also have a nice little title as being “the righteousness of God” in Christ and of being “saints”, but, according to some, while we are in the body we are still essentially “Sinners” by nature. The title is purely symbolic and promissory with no actual experience of true righteousness or holiness available to us in this life.

The problem in teaching that we are all “Sinners” (both by action and by nature) is that this error hinders the beautiful truth of 1 Corinthians 5:17, that we who have been born again have experienced a profound change, a change that literally empowers us *by grace through faith* to walk in true holiness and righteousness even while in the body.

There are various models put forth for the makeup of man, but, without arguing the merits for choosing the model I use, the spirit is that part of man capable of sensing and relating to the spiritual dimension. The body is that part of man capable of sensing and relating to the natural world, and the soul (mind, emotions, will) is that part of man capable of processing both and choosing a response to either.

In biblical terms the “heart” is frequently a reference to both spirit and soul (innermost being), and it is the heart, or the soul as dynamically influenced by the spirit (a “living” soul), that determines whether a man is a “Sinner” or a “saint”.

The Bible says that God created Adam as a “living soul” capable of uninhibited communion with both God and with the natural world. When we talk about the way in which Adam was created we say he was a “generated” (created) being. As a generated man, Adam’s spirit was alive to God, and he communed freely with the Father. Adam’s soul (mind, emotions, and will) were not sinful, because his “living soul” was in perfect agreement with his God-connected spirit. Likewise, his physical body was not sinful and was not subject to death or decay. Thus Adam’s essential nature as a “generated” man was one of innocence, without spot or blemish, because his spirit was alive to God and his soul was, as yet, untarnished.

When Adam broke the covenant his spirit was disconnected from God (became dead to God), and he became a “degenerated” man, no longer capable of complete, uninhibited communion with the Father. Adam’s soul and body, too, now disconnected from the influence of a God-connected spirit, became corrupt and subject to sin and disobedience (“death”). Thus Adam’s essential nature as a “degenerated” man was sinful, because his spirit was disconnected from God, and all men and women born since that time have been born “in Adam” as “degenerated” beings with spirits disconnected from God and corrupt souls and bodies enslaved to sin and disobedience (“death”).

It is God’s purpose through Jesus Christ to reconcile men to Himself in order to fulfill His original purpose and plan for mankind. This reconciliation begins with the regeneration of man’s spirit and his instantaneous sanctification (setting apart) for the purpose of God, followed by the gradual transformation of his soul, and the ultimate resurrection of his body.

It might be helpful for those who are confused by the use of the word “sinner” to think in more abstract terms. A man is either *degenerated* “in Adam” and a slave to sin, or he is *regenerated* “in Christ” and now has the ability by grace through faith, to overcome sin.

Therefore there is now no condemnation... (to a life of slavery to sin)... for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. Romans 8:1,2 NASB (insert is the author’s)

Upon faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, our spirits are made alive to God again, and we are said to be “regenerated”. However, the new connection to God “in Christ” does not automatically transform the soul (mind, emotions, will) or the physical body. Therefore, the born again believer is subject to both the old degenerated (sin trained) aspects of his soul and the new regenerated aspect of his spirit, but the re-connection to God in his spirit has brought about an essential change. He was degenerated and a “Sinner” (i.e. a *slave to sin*). He has now been regenerated as a “new creation”, “the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus to do good works”, and “the righteousness of God in Christ”. The old has gone at the cross, the new has come in resurrection life, and, because his spirit has been made alive to God again, he is now a “saint.”

*You have been regenerated... (born again)..., not from a mortal origin... (seed, sperm)..., but from...(the seed of)... one that is immortal...(Jesus Christ)... by the ever living and lasting Word of God. Such...(sinners)... were some of you; but you were washed, but you were **sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:11 NASB (emphasis and inserts are the author’s)*

In the preceding passage we should note that believers have been “washed” (forgiven and cleansed of sin-guilt), “sanctified” (set apart for the purpose of God), and “justified” (given right standing with God) at the moment of our mystical incorporation in Christ by grace through faith. No one who has been forgiven and cleansed of sin-guilt, set apart for the purpose of God, and given right standing with God through the blood of Jesus Christ should deny or denigrate the finished work of Jesus Christ by continuing to refer to himself or to believers in general as “Sinners”.

Yes, we all continue to sin to some degree, but we are not “Sinners”. We are “saints” who sometimes sin, and the term “sinner” should only be used carefully in reference to the saint who is caught up in some specific, habitual, unrepentant sin leading to death.

I do not even use the term in my intimate prayer times in the throne room of grace. I confess my “sin” with a broken and contrite heart. I confess that I have “sinned” and grieved the Holy Spirit, but I do not confess unbelief and error by referring to myself with the title of “Sinner”. That title implies that I have not been freed from the power of sin in my life, and, therefore, denies the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

There is a Great Divide between the biblical teaching that we are now the *righteousness of God in Christ* who still have sin in our lives because of our unrenewed minds and the residual influence of the, as yet, untransformed flesh (the old man), and those who preach and teach, knowingly or unknowingly, that we are still “Sinners” by nature (deliberate capital “S”), sinners who by the grace of God and our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior are going to heaven, but still essentially Sinners.

One of the key passages for our understanding of this paradox is found in 2 Corinthians 4:7 as Paul points out that we have this “treasure” (the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit) in earthen vessels. This reference to our physical bodies and to the non-transformed aspects of a believer’s soul as “earthen vessels” does not infer the status of “Sinner”. A “Sinner” does not have this treasure at all. A “saint” has this treasure in a non-transformed physical body and incompletely transformed soul in order to reveal that the glory of Christ manifesting itself in the life of the regenerated saint is from God and not from the believer himself.

But the life and glory of Christ is never revealed in the life of un-regenerated Sinners who have not experienced the new birth and do not have this “treasure”.

One of the reasons we have a problem accepting what scripture says about who we are in Christ is that we base our judgment on the common non-Christian world view that a man's essential nature is defined by his behavior, appearance, accomplishments, and status in society.

The biblical Truth, as defined by scripture, is that a man's essential nature is defined by his spirit or his "heart", that innermost part of his being that is either connected or not connected to God and not by external appearances or behavior.

"Sanctification", the process from which we get the word, "saint", means to be set apart for the purpose of God. It does not mean sinless perfection, but God does not ordinarily set apart "Sinners" for His purpose, either. Upon our faith in Jesus Christ He changed us through the baptism of the Spirit. We who were "Sinners" became "saints".

The natural, un-regenerated man does not have the influence of Jesus Christ in his spirit. His spirit is not dead, but it is no longer connected to God. In the degenerated state man is still capable of spiritual communion, but he no longer has a direct connection with God. Therefore, his thoughts, words, and actions are influenced entirely by the way his natural intelligence, potentially influenced by spiritual communion with demonic spirits, responds to the social and spiritual environment of the world systems (kosmos) that he comes into contact with.

Scripture teaches us that these world systems (i.e. religion and "spiritual" activities, government, economy, media, education, science, etc.) are primarily influenced and controlled by Satan, the "god" of this present age. It is natural then for the degenerated man's thoughts, words, and actions to be a result of his attempts to meet the natural, self-actualized psychological needs of security, identity, stimulation, and, even, spiritual fulfillment, through those same world systems.

The result is, by definition, "sinful", no matter how "good" he may seem to the world, because that man, who is a "Sinner" by God's definition, cannot, by any means, produce the righteous nature of Jesus Christ in his thoughts, words, or actions.

The scriptural, biblical world view is that a man's status is determined entirely by whether he is still a degenerated being with no connection to God or a regenerated (born again) being who has a direct connection with God through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The one who has been regenerated is thus dynamically connected to the *divine nature* and included in the covenant of God through Jesus Christ.

If a man is degenerated, he is a "Sinner". If a man has been regenerated, he is a "Saint". No amount of sin in the believer's life matters in regard to this definition. A man is, essentially, either a degenerated sinner or a regenerated saint. Period.

Just as the genetics or DNA of a plant or an animal determine the essential quality of that plant or animal, the regenerated man's spirit is made alive to God when "God's seed" or spiritual DNA, which is the quality and character of Jesus Christ Himself, is planted in our spirits in the form of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?
1 Corinthians 3:16 NIV

The inductive question that should come to mind immediately upon reading this passage is "Can a 'Sinner' also be the temple of God?"

This same question has to be asked concerning all the other passages concerning who we are now "in Christ".

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV

I frequently hear those who love to use the all-inclusive phrase, “we’re all Sinners”, also urge others to “live right” in order to maintain their “fellowship with the Lord”, but the two are mutually exclusive. If you claim to still be a “Sinner” (saved by grace and going to heaven, but still essentially a Sinner) then you are incapable of true fellowship with the Lord while still in the flesh.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. Romans 8:9 NASB

Thus the regenerated man’s essential nature is changed, because he now has the spiritual DNA of Jesus Christ Himself in his spirit. He was a degenerated “Sinner”, and he is now a regenerated “saint”. But his mind, emotions, and will must undergo a progressive transformation from the inside out. This process is called “progressive sanctification” or the “renewing of the mind”, in order for the believer’s thoughts, words, and actions to become an expression of his new essential nature as a “saint” and the “righteousness of God in Christ”.

*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, **perfecting holiness** out of reverence for God 2 Corinthians 7:1 NIV (emphasis is the author’s)*

“Perfecting holiness” does not mean to become perfectly holy. It means to enter into the process of becoming mature in the holiness already imparted to us through the new birth as we conform to the image (spiritual DNA) of the Son in our spirits. And Paul says we should do this with “fear and trembling”.

...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Phillipians 2:12, 13 NIV

Obviously Paul is not talking about “salvation” in terms of regeneration here. He is talking about the process of transformation that takes place in the life of a born again believer as he makes obedient faith responses to the revealed will of God. This process of progressive sanctification or “perfecting holiness” is also commonly referred to as “Christian growth”, but it is not automatic. It can be resisted by the believer, but the Word of God warns us that we should take the process very seriously, as we respond positively to the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit.

*Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. **No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins...**(by nature)...has seen Him or knows Him. **No one who is born of God practices sin...**(by nature)..., because His seed abides in him; and **he cannot sin...**(as the natural result of his essential nature)..., because he is born of God. John 3:4-6,9 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)*

John is not saying that the believer will ever walk in sinless perfection. He is saying that it is no longer his essential nature to sin. A dancer may fall down, but falling down is not part of being a dancer. It is the dancer's nature to dance, not to fall down. A crippled man falls down because it is his nature to fall down, and he is incapable of dancing.

A "Sinner" sins because it is his nature, and he cannot produce righteousness (the nature of Christ) no matter how moral and good he is. A regenerated, born again believer is righteous by nature (through the indwelling presence of Christ), even though he may "fall down" in his thoughts, words, and actions when, through disobedience, he rejects the revealed will of God and the indwelling influence of Christ in his spirit.

The born again believer, though, is capable of grace-empowered true righteousness and holy living when his thoughts, words, and actions are in agreement with the indwelling presence of the Lord (when he is "abiding" in the Lord by grace through faith). Therefore, when the believer sins, he is like the dancer falling down. He is not like the crippled man who falls down because it is his nature to fall down.

But what about the continuing presence of sin in the life of the regenerated, born again believer or "saint"?

Secular psychologists have proven that men and women of any age will respond to the circumstances of life on the basis of what they believe, and what others confirm, about themselves. If they believe they are stupid, regardless of their IQ, they will respond as if they are stupid. If they believe they are winners, they will act like winners. And born again, regenerated believers, inhabited by the Holy Spirit, who believe that they are Sinners by nature, will continue to act like Sinners, living down to their expectations.

There will be guilt and remorse as they confess their besetting sins over and over, but there will be no real power over sin in their lives. They are the "wretched man" Paul describes in Romans 7:14-24, and they have not, yet, discovered Romans 7:25 through Romans 8:4.

What a wretched man I am. Who will save me from this body of death?

To that question, Paul answers: *Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

And in Romans 8 he explains (emphasis and inserts are the author's):

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because **through Christ Jesus**...(by faith)... **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. And so **He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit**...(which is how the law of the Spirit of Life frees us from the law of sin and death.)*

The law of sin and death has reigned, and will continue to reign, in those who are in Adam (his descendents), but the law of the Spirit of life is operative in the lives of those who have been adopted as sons of God and spiritually ingrafted into the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL " The last Adam...(Jesus Christ)... became a life-giving spirit.

However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 NASB
(inserts are the author's)

A “law” is a principle of operation within a system. The law of gravity is a principle of operation within a specific physical system. The law of aerodynamic lift is another principle of operation within the same physical system, and it becomes operative when a particular wing shape moves through the air at a certain speed. The law of gravity is then overcome by the law of aerodynamic lift. The law of gravity is not destroyed. It is just made of no effect.

The law of sin and death is like the law of gravity. It is there as a constant in the, as yet, untransformed “flesh”. But just as the law of aerodynamic lift overcomes the law of gravity and makes it of no effect, so the law of the Spirit of life overcomes the law of sin and death in those who walk in the Spirit by faith.

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you **will not** gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16 NIV* (bold is the author's)

When we “saints” are walking in the Spirit by faith, according to Romans 8:4 the righteous requirements of the law (God's revealed will) are being *fully met* in us, and, by definition, a “Sinner” cannot meet the righteous requirements of the law.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for the believer who still thinks of himself as a “Sinner” by nature, to live by the Spirit. He just can't fly, because he doesn't believe he can fly, wretched man that he is. But the one who identifies with his new nature in Christ will learn to fly in the Spirit, because he believes in his heart what scripture says about who he is in Christ. And, as we have previously stated, he rises to the expectation. At first the flights will be short-lived, and there will be frequent crashes. But eventually the flights become longer and higher, and the crashes less frequent and less damaging.

A wise pastor once said that only a strong, faith-based, self-image of who we are in Christ will prevent us from yielding to the besetting sins in our lives. That pastor was on to something. Why then do so many believers cling to the non-scriptural belief that they are still Sinners by nature when the Bible clearly teaches us that we are chosen, justified, forgiven, sanctified, regenerated, born again, new creations, the workmanship of God, indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit, baptized into the mystical Body of Christ, a holy nation, priests in the order of Melchizedek, ambassadors of Christ, adopted as sons, who are now the righteousness of God in Christ and covenant heirs with Jesus Christ himself?

Part of the reason why so many Christians are willing to believe that they are still “Sinners” is that evangelicals continually preach that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, which is accurate when related to the unsaved and to the believer's former state of being. But this sin-consciousness pervades and perverts what scripture says about our new life in Christ. The lines are blurred, and our awareness that there is still sin in the life of believers blinds us to the beautiful truth of God's Word.

In the church that my wife and I belonged to at the time of my conversion I wondered why the Sunday morning sermon was always an evangelical message preached to the same believers who had heard the same message over and over. I learned that evangelism was the strong point of that denomination and that the preaching of an evangelical message each Sunday along with an overextended invitation was traditional.

Thank God for the outreach of traditional evangelical denominations. However, it is no wonder so many believers in those denominations still identify themselves as “Sinners” and

cannot identify with their new life in Christ as “saints”, because they are addressed as “Sinners” every Sunday morning from the pulpit.

A survey of those who identify themselves as “born again” evangelical Christians found that fewer than 5% had ever personally led someone to saving faith in Christ. There is no lack of witness training or witnessing tools in the church, but it seems that the dependency is on missionaries, evangelistic crusades, youth camps, and Sunday after Sunday preaching from the pulpit to win the lost to Christ.

Why are there so few born again Christians who are personally making disciples?

The religious zeal is there to support missionaries, evangelistic crusades, youth camps, and Sunday after Sunday preaching of the gospel, but religious zeal apparently does not carry over into the personal lives of many evangelical believers.

Why?

My opinion is that boldness and enthusiasm in a personal witness to the lost does not come from training or from programs. It comes, instead, from the joy of fellowship with the Lord, and those who have a strong self-image as “Sinners” rather than a faith-based, Spirit revealed, self-image as “the righteousness of God in Christ”, do not frequently experience the joy of an intimate, grace-empowered, righteous walk with the Lord. Instead, they are inhibited by the belief that they are still “Sinners”, and their witness is motivated by guilt rather than the joy of fellowship with Him.

It is also my conviction that many who teach that “we are all Sinners” do so because it is politically expedient not to challenge that particular tradition in their denomination or fellowship, and they have to use guilt and the opinion of men to motivate their churches to produce the work and support needed in the local fellowship.

On an individual level, self-degradation, calling ourselves “Sinners”, is also seen to be an act of humility among believers who are in bondage to this tradition, but that is the false humility of religious pride. True humility is the acknowledgment of what scripture says about who we are now in Jesus Christ.

“I am the righteousness of God in Christ” is not a self-aggrandizing statement. It is a Christ-aggrandizing statement. And “I’m just an old Sinner saved by grace” is not a statement of true humility. It is a statement of unbelief and a denial of the finished work of grace on the cross of Calvary.

Others explain this paradox by teaching that we are “saints” as an imputed position in Christ, but that our condition (our real life after re-birth) still continues on as a “Sinner”. They teach that the believer’s condition will ultimately be equal to his imputed position in Christ, but not in this lifetime. This viewpoint denies the possibility of a believer being capable of grace-empowered acts of true righteousness and assumes that any act of sin is proof that no essential change has taken place. “We are the righteousness of God in Christ” becomes their statement in regard to our imputed “position” in Christ. “We are all Sinners” becomes their statement in regard to our current “condition” or behavior in Christ.

It would be accurate to say, “we all continue to sin to some degree”, but, “we are all Sinners”, implies that no essential change has taken place in our lives.

This viewpoint of imputed righteousness but unchanged nature has a certain appeal to our natural minds, especially as we acknowledge the sin in our own lives, and it would be accurate if the new birth was purely symbolical or was only fulfilled upon resurrection or rapture.

Our “position” or standing in Christ is that of righteousness because His nature inhabits our spirits. But our “condition” or state of being may or may not be that of righteousness, because our souls (mind, emotions, and will) contain un-renewed, un-transformed strongholds of the old sin-trained soul.

The view of those who believe that we are still sinners by nature is that the soul continues to remain in a completely sinful state of being, and that we do not put on the righteousness of Christ until we are completely freed from the sinful nature in heaven. But scripture teaches us that the soul is gradually transformed from the inside out as we make obedient faith responses to the revealed will of God, and that it is God's purpose for us to *put on* the new nature, the nature of Christ, even while we are living in the flesh.

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 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.** Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV (bold is the author's)*

This "putting on" of the new self is something that happens while we are still in the body, and the result is that the initial essential change that took place in our spirits at the moment of regeneration gradually becomes a condition or actual state of being in our souls (mind, emotions, will) as we begin to conform to the spiritual DNA of Christ in our spirits through faith and obedience.

*For by these... (His glory and excellence)... He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them... (by the promises)... you may become **partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.** 2 Peter 1:4 NIV (emphasis and inserts are the author's)*

Peter states that it is possible to rise above the corruption of the old un-renewed soul and participate in the divine nature (and this by grace through faith), but I cannot imagine "Sinners" participating in the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Nor is there any reason for us to "put on" righteousness or perfect holiness if we are not intended to walk in the righteousness and holiness of Christ by grace through faith.

*For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish (refuse, dregs), in order that I may win (gain) Christ (the Anointed One), And that I may [actually] be found and known as in Him, not having any [self-achieved] righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands (ritualistic uprightness and supposed right standing with God thus acquired), but possessing that [**genuine righteousness**] which comes through faith in Christ (the Anointed One), the [truly] right standing with God, which comes from God by [saving] faith. [For my **determined purpose** is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way... (progressively through participatory fellowship)... come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually **transformed** [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope] that if possible I may attain to the [spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me]... (through the law of the Spirit of life)... out from among the dead [even while in the body]. Phillippians 3:8-11 Amplified (emphasis and inserts are the author's)*

Once the essential change has been made in our spirits we have become a "new creation", the righteousness of God in Christ, and in the passage above we see that we enter into the chrysalis struggle to bring our souls (mind, emotions, and will) into agreement with the change that has already taken place in our spirits. Paul, understanding the process of this progressive

sanctification or transformation of our souls through fellowship with the Lord, tells us that our fellowship with the Lord brings His resurrection power to bear on our souls, transforming us from the inside out, and from one degree of glory to another.

*But whenever a person turns [in repentance] to the Lord, the veil is stripped off and taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (emancipation from bondage, freedom). . . .(freedom from the spiritual blindness of those who still identify themselves as “sinners”) . . . And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. . . .(identifying by faith with who we really are in Christ) . . . , are constantly being **transfigured** into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 Amplified (emphasis and inserts are the author’s)*

In this amazing scripture we see that it is our faith-based identification with, and obedience to, who we are in Christ, that transforms us by the renewing of our minds so that our thoughts, words, and actions become like His thoughts, words, and actions.

The teaching that “we are all Sinners” hinders our faith-filled identification with who we are in Christ, and, therefore, hinders our transformation into His likeness in thought, word, and action.

Likewise, those who are still “Sinners” can never reveal the glory of God through their obedient faith responses to the revealed will of God, but those who now have the Spirit of Christ in their inner being are capable of experiencing the glory of God, who is Jesus Christ, and of being transformed in our souls by that experience so that His glory is manifested in our thoughts, words, and actions.

If a saint is still a saint when he sins, then why does he need to be *cleansed of unrighteousness* as 1 John 1:9 states?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 NASB

This scripture assumes that the “normal” saint is literally walking in true grace-empowered righteousness by faith. When the saint falls away from his righteous walk through disobedience it is time to go back to the throne of grace to be cleansed of all unrighteousness and restored to a righteous walk through the forgiveness of the Father. The born again believer who identifies himself as a “Sinner” by nature will be confused by this passage. He knows he needs to ask God’s forgiveness when he sins, but what does being cleansed of all unrighteousness mean to him? If it means that he has somehow lost his imputed righteousness, then it correlates that he has also lost his salvation (as some have erroneously believed) and that he must be regenerated. The only other possible meaning is that the believer was walking in real, not merely imputed, righteousness. Otherwise there would be no need for the believer to be cleansed of all unrighteousness.

It is not incorrect to refer to a believer who, through a hardened heart, deliberately keeps on sinning, as a “sinner”, because we are referring to his deliberate, habitual, disobedient behavior, not his essential nature. However, we are not all “sinners”, even as a general description of our behavior. There is sin in every believer’s life, but the presence of sin is not what defines us. We are defined by the presence of Christ in our spirits.

When John says, *No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning...*, he is not making a direct reference to the law of the Spirit of life, but he is revealing the principle. “Living” *in Him* (in Christ) is the same as walking in the Spirit, walking by faith, walking in the light, etc. It is the ingrafted life of the believer living vitally connected to the vine *by grace through faith*. And, in that believer, the law of the Spirit of life overcomes the law of sin and death. But if the believer becomes disconnected from the vine (i.e. broken fellowship) then the law of sin and death dominates again.

This brings us to the primary reason why so many believers are willing to believe that they are still sinners by nature. The traditional teaching that we (Christians and non-Christians alike) are all Sinners may be accepted without question by some just because it continues to be preached and taught, but most believers are willing to believe they are still sinners by nature because their lives are dominated by sin.

If I think like a “sinner”, speak like a “sinner”, and act like a “sinner”, am I not a “Sinner”?

“Sinner” may adequately describe your behavior at the moment, but you are not a “Sinner” if you are born again. You’re like a bad dancer who continually falls down, and you’re like the caterpillar struggling in the chrysalis to metamorphose into a butterfly. The caterpillar is really a butterfly that has not, yet, manifested its true nature. The butterfly nature is buried deep in the double helix of its DNA, and regenerated believers, likewise, have the spiritual DNA of Christ in our spirits working its way out through the trials and struggles in this life as we learn to obey the Holy Spirit revealed will of God in our lives.

Some butterflies, though, never make it out of the cocoon. They are butterflies, even in the larval stage, but they never manifest the fullness of their genetic inheritance. Likewise, some saints never manifest the fullness of their new nature in Christ. They are saints, but, because of unrepentant defeat and bondage to sin, they never break free of their sin-trained, sin-dominated souls to become all that they were meant to be.

In mankind, as we have demonstrated, it is our spirit, or our “heart”, that determines our essential nature, not our souls (mind, emotions, will) or our body. The natural man is dead to God in his spirit, and is, therefore, still “in Adam” and subject (or a slave to) sin. Those who are born again are made alive to God in their spirits, and they are no longer in Adam but “in Christ”.

Therefore, we (mankind) are not all “brothers” any more than we (mankind) are all “Sinners”. Those who are in Adam are brothers to each other and they are sinners by nature, but those who are in Christ are no longer brothers to those who are in Adam. We have been adopted into the family of God, and our brothers are those who have, likewise, been adopted into the family of God.

Neither are we all “Sinners”. We may still look and act like “Sinners”, but, because the spiritual DNA of Jesus Christ himself now indwells our spirits, the manifestation of our new Christ-like nature should be taking shape more and more as each day goes by.

But don’t we need to continually hear about the sin in our lives in order to stop sinning?

When I am counseling a believer who is battling some besetting sin in their lives I always ask the question: “If Jesus Christ showed up at your door tomorrow morning and spent the next twenty-four hours with you, would you still be having a problem with this sin (or unbelief)?”

The answer is always, “No, of course not. If Jesus was with me I could resist the temptation to sin (or unbelief).”

Therefore, if we focus on SIN there will be conviction, but no power to overcome the sin. If, instead, we focus on HIM (and on who we are in Him) then the light of our fellowship with Him will expose sin, and the Law of the Spirit of life will set us free from the Law of sin and death.

We do need to clearly understand what scripture identifies as sin (missing the mark or standard of the covenant requirements), and we need to be obedient to the inner witness and restraint of the Holy Spirit in regard to our thoughts, words, and actions. But there will be two distinct reactions by born again believers to any preaching and teaching about sin.

The one who is still in bondage to his identity as a “Sinner” will naturally gravitate toward legalism, because external obedience to religious rules and the expectations of men is all he is capable of doing. If he is zealous in his legalism he will be attracted to constant preaching about sin, and he will be angered and confused by any message about who we are in Christ.

The one who identifies with his new life in Christ, on the other hand, will be quick to repent as he responds to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, because it is now against his inner nature to sin.

I am convinced, then, that if we teach believers to identify with who they are in Christ instead of preaching that “we are all Sinners”, those who “hear” the message will be empowered to overcome the residual sin in their lives. When a believer who is taught that he is still a “Sinner” commits a sin or fails to walk in the will of God, he may feel guilty because of the constant preaching about sin, but he accepts his sin as being normal.

When the believer, who has a strong self-image of who he is in Christ, sins, he/she is horrified and repulsed by the sin because it is inconsistent with their life as a new creation in Christ, and they feel loss because of their damaged fellowship with the Lord. That one will quickly repent and be *cleansed of all unrighteousness* according to 1 John 1:9.

The one who identifies by faith with what scripture says about who he is in Christ is empowered to overcome sin through the law of the Spirit of life, but the one who identifies himself as a “Sinner” is caught up in an endless cycle of sin and guilt. He knows he is forgiven, but he does not know, practically, that he has been freed from the law of sin and death. What a wretched man he is. Who will rescue him from that body of death?

At this point, the believer who has had a revelation concerning what scripture really says about who he/she is in Christ, refuting the stronghold of false humility and unbelieving religious tradition that continues to teach believers that we are all “Sinners” by nature, would be prudent to examine the following list comparing “Sinners” and “saints” and then meditate on the following scripture passages, allowing the Holy Spirit, our Counselor, to confirm the Truth.

In doing so the believer should paraphrase the scripture passages to make them a personal statement of faith. As you read them through for the first time, ask this question of each paraphrased passage: “Does this passage apply to one who is still a ‘Sinner’ by nature?”

Sinner

Unforgiven by God
Degenerated
In Adam
Debauched
Born of the seed of Adam
A fallen creation
Stranger to the covenant
The old man

Saint

Forgiven by God
Regenerated
In Christ
Ingrafted
Born of the seed of Christ
A new creation
In covenant with God through Jesus Christ
A new man

Spirit dead to God	Spirit alive to God
No permanent influence from God	Permanently indwelt by the Spirit
God's law external	God's law written on the heart
Subject to (or judged by) the law	Freed from (judgment by) the law
Subject to the law of sin and death	Set free from the law of sin and death
Not sanctified	Sanctified for God's purpose
Incapable of "good" works of faith	Created to do "good" works of faith
Not gifted by the Spirit	Gifted by the Spirit
In darkness	In the light
Incapable of spiritual understanding	Capable of spiritual understanding
Participates in the Adamic nature	Participants in the divine nature of Christ

Paraphrased scripture passages for personal meditation:

I have been regenerated by the seed of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:23

I am a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old is gone. The new has come.
2 Corinthians 5:17

I am the temple of God, because Christ lives in me. 1 Corinthians 3:16

I am the workmanship of God in Christ, created in Him to do good works of faith.
Ephesians 2:10

I am no longer a Sinner by nature, because I have been sanctified and justified.
1 Corinthians 6:11

I am no longer in the flesh, ruled by its nature, but in the Spirit because the Spirit of God lives in me. Romans 8:9

Because I have been born again of God it is no longer my true nature to sin, and when I do sin it is contrary to my true nature and to the presence of Him who lives in me.
John 3:4-6, 9

The law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2

Because His Spirit lives in me I will not sin as long as I conform to His nature through grace-empowered acts of faith. Galatians 5:16

As He is, so am I in this world. John 4:17

So be it.