

The Eagle

St. John Lutheran Church + Houghton Lake, Michigan 48629

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The View From Here

Both A Saint And Sinner?

How can one be both a saint and a sinner? There's a Latin theological phrase "simul justus et peccator" which means "*simultaneously 100% righteous and 100% sinner.*" The phrase was an expression used during the Reformation as Martin Luther brought this to clarity. It reflects more the Bible's teaching about grace; opposing the popular teaching of the day that baptism, while it washed away original sin, you had to deal with the sins that followed, as if we were blank slates, and we merely had an inclination to sin.

I know, this sounds pretty theological, so I should unpack this a little bit more ...

The bottom line is that this is a comforting teaching that helps explain why we struggle at times to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus while at the same time confessing faith in Him. You know how it goes: you're thankful for the gift of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus; you confess faith in Him; you serve Him with both words and actions; but you still find yourself failing and falling short in your life. It's a tension that can be confusing, even frustrating. This teaching of being both completely forgiven and holy in the sight of God because of Jesus Christ, and also being a fallen sinner at the same time helps explain the tension we feel in our current reality.

If you struggle in that tension, you're not losing it or crazy ... on the contrary! This is a clear Biblical teaching. Just think about the Apostle Paul's words in Romans, chapter 7. Even about himself, Paul said: "***I don't understand my own actions. I don't do what I want, but the very thing I hate, I do. Now if I don't do what I want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin which lives within me. For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh.***" Then he says this, "***For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out***" (Romans 7:15-20 ESV). You can hear the struggle that's going on within him. Then he said, "***Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?***" And then here it comes, "***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***" (Romans 7:24-25 ESV)

We hear the struggle. Paul is lamenting his sinful flesh while at the same time he thanks God for the redemption he's received through Jesus Christ. That's an important and clarifying truth for followers of Jesus. First, it takes away the false and dangerous notion that our sin will result in our condemnation. People worry if they will slip up and fail God--sometimes very seriously and grievously--that God will cast them out forever and never forgive them. It's not true. For every sin and failure we have a faithful Savior and Redeemer. Any person who laments his or her brokenness and sin, can say with Paul, by God's grace and because of His love, "***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***"

This is why Jesus came. This is why He was born. St. Paul later says that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. Though we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We are declared righteous through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

This teaching about being a saint and a sinner at the same time guards us from another trap; it keeps us from the illusion that, somehow, we can reach perfection in this life. While we can grow in faith and mature in our walk with Jesus, and while being a sinner/saint is no excuse to live in willful disobedience, we do need to realize that our fallen nature will be at war within us for the duration of our lives on this earth. Therefore, living with the errant expectation that, one day, we can be perfect on this earth, could plunge a person into hopelessness and constant disappointment.

While we can celebrate a growing and developing walk with our Savior, we should also remember that all the good we do is also done by His grace. So, believers, take heart! When you fail as sinners, it should not be surprising due to your fallen condition. That's precisely why Jesus came to bring His forgiveness of sin and His new life. When you live a life that is pleasing to God, it is cause to rejoice and give God all the credit and thanksgiving for His living in and through you. So, in all things, God is your refuge, your strength, and your faithful friend ... how do we know? Because He's risen from the dead!! Joyous Easter! Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!!

That's the View from Here

Pastor Bill Winter