

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Romans, chapter 8, verse 1. This can be found on page ____ in your pew Bibles. We begin a new series today "Respectable Sins". Today's text encourages us to live in accordance with the Spirit of God.

The word of God

(Ro 8:1-11)

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 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, 4 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.

5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

NIV

In our modern times, the word saint is seldom used. But when it is, it is most often used to describe a person, usually elderly, that has *unusually godly character*. Someone might say, “if there ever was a saint, it is my grandmother.” Upon hearing such a statement, we immediately picture a kind, gracious woman who regularly reads her Bible and prays and who is known for her good deeds toward others.

This form of address seems to be a favorite of Paul’s. He uses it in several of his letters and frequently refers to *believers* as *saints*. How could Paul refer to *ordinary believers*, even the *problem-plagued ones* at Corinth, as *Saints*? How could the apostle Paul address the messed-up believers at the church in Corinth as saints?

The popular meaning of words often change over time, based on their common usage. So today we wouldn’t think of those messed up Corinthians as saints. We might call them worldly, carnal, or immature, but certainly not saints. In the Roman Catholic tradition, sainthood is conferred on Christians of exceptionally outstanding character and achievement.

This church in Corinth was all messed up, both theologically and morally. They were proud and fractious; they tolerated gross immorality, sued each other in court, flaunted their freedom in Christ, abused the observance of the Lord’s Supper, misunderstood the purpose of spiritual gifts, and were confused about the future resurrection of believers.

Yet, when writing to them, Paul addressed them as “Saints” or as those “called to be saints.” Do any of these descriptions sound familiar? Could they be applied to our churches in modern times? Could they be applied to *us*, as believers in Christ Jesus? Could the word saint be applied to us?

The answer lies in the meaning of the word as it is used in the Bible. The Greek word for saint is *hagios*, it doesn't refer to our *character* but to our *state of being*. It literally means "one who is separated unto God." Every believer – even the most ordinary and the most immature – is a saint. The actual wording of Paul's address in 1 Corinthians is to "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."

The question you may find yourself asking is, "separated for what, or for whom?" The answer is, "for God." Every true believer has been separated or set apart by God for God. In the book of Titus chapter 2, verse 14, Paul described our Lord Jesus Christ as the One who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul says to us, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price." Together these two passages help us understand the biblical meaning of saint. It is someone whom Christ bought with His own blood on the cross and has separated unto Himself to be His own possession.

Every new believer has been set apart by God, separated unto God to be transformed into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. In this sense, every believer is a saint – a person separated from his old sinful way of life and set apart by God to increasingly glorify God as his life is transformed.

In the biblical sense of the term, sainthood is not a status of achievement and character but of a state of being – an entirely new condition of life brought about by the Spirit of God.

Paul describes it in Acts 26:18 as “turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God,” and again in Col 1:13 as having been “delivered ... from the dominion of darkness and transferred ... to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

We don't become saints by our actions. We are made saints by the immediate supernatural action of the Holy Spirit alone who works this change deep within our inner being so that we do, in fact, become new creations in Christ. This change of state is described prophetically in Ezekiel 36: 26: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” So we have our dead unresponsive heart replaced with a living, responsive heart.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could end the story here, suggesting that a saint is someone who no longer sins? We all know that is not true. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that nearly every waking hour, we sin in thought, word, or deed. Even our best deeds are stained with impure, mixed motives and imperfect performance. How many of us can ever begin to say, “I have loved my neighbor as myself?” The greatest commandment that Christ gives us Mt 22:37-40

37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Why does this disconnect exist? The disconnect that God seemingly promises, and what we experience in our daily lives? The answer is found in such Scripture as Galatians 5:17, which says, “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for those who are apposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”

Even the Apostle Paul, someone we would readily identify as a real saint, realized this disconnect, he himself says in Ro 7:18-20 **18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.**

So, what we discover is that there is a guerrilla warfare going on between the flesh and the Spirit fought every day in the heart of every Christian. That is why Peter urges us in 1 Peter 2:11 **“to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wages war against your soul.”** So although there is a decisive change that occurs in the heart of every new believer, the outworking of that change is not instantaneous and absolute. Instead it’s progressive over time and never complete in this life. We shouldn’t use this awareness of the struggle with sin as an excuse for sinful behavior. Rather, we should always keep in mind that we are saints called to live a life that is set apart for God.

We should heed Paul’s warning in his first letter to the church in Corinth, as he addresses them as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,” then he spends the remainder of his letter telling them to act like saints. Paul’s letter could be summarized in this statement: “You are Saints, Now act like saints.” Be what you are. That is to say, be in your behavior what you are in your state of being.

In the military, there is an expression, “conduct unbecoming an officer.” That expression covered anything from minor offenses resulting in a reprimand to major ones requiring a court martial. But the expression was more than a description of out of line behavior; it was a statement that the conduct was inconsistent with that expected of a military officer. The officer so described had failed to live up to his responsibility to act as an officer should act.

Perhaps we should adopt a similar expression for believers: “conduct unbecoming a saint.” This expression would pull us up short wouldn’t it? When we gossip or become impatient or get angry, we could remind ourselves that our conduct is unbecoming a saint. We are, in principle, to some degree, acting like the Corinthians. We are living inconsistently with our calling.

The Bible has another word for conduct unbecoming a saint. It is sin, and it covers a wide range of misbehavior. It covers everything from impatience to murder. Obviously, there are degrees of seriousness of sin. But in the final analysis, sin is sin. It is conduct unbecoming a Saint.

One of our problems, however, is that we neither think of ourselves as saints – with our new responsibility to live as saints, nor do we think of such actions as our gossip and impatience as sin. We can readily identify sin in the immoral or unethical conduct of people in society at large. But we often fail to see it in the “acceptable or respectable sins of the saints.” In effect, we, like society at large, live in denial of our sin. So now let’s move on to talk about sin and our frequent denial of it in our lives.

The whole idea of sin has virtually disappeared from our culture. Unfortunately, the idea of sin is all but disappearing from many churches as well. So the entire concept of sin has virtually disappeared from our American culture at large and has been softened, even with many of our churches, to accommodate modern sensibilities. Strong biblical words for sin have been excised from our vocabulary. People no longer commit adultery; instead they have an affair. Corporate executives do not steal; they commit fraud.

But what about our conservative churches? Has the idea of sin all but disappeared from us also? No, it has not disappeared, but it has, in many instances, been deflected to those outside our circles who commit flagrant sins such as abortion, homosexuality, and murder, or the notorious white-collar crimes of high-level corporate executives. It's easy for us to condemn those obvious sins while virtually ignoring our own sins of gossip, pride, envy, bitterness, and lust, or even our lack of those gracious qualities that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit in the 5th chapter of Galatians. On the whole, we appear to be more concerned about the sins of society than we are the respectable sins of the saints.

In fact, we often indulge in the "respectable" or even "acceptable" sins without any sense of sin. Our gossip or unkind words about a brother or sister in Christ roll easily off our tongues without any awareness of wrongdoing. We harbor hurts over wrongs long past without any effort to forgive as God has forgiven us.

We were infuriated, and rightfully so, when a major denomination ordained a practicing homosexual as a bishop. Why do we not also mourn over our selfishness, our critical spirit, our impatience, and our anger?

It's easy to let ourselves off the hook by saying that these sins are not as bad as the flagrant ones of society. But God has not given us the authority to establish values for different sins. Instead, He says through James 2:10, "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. That may be difficult for us to understand because we think in terms of individual laws and their respective penalties. But God's Law is seamless. The Bible speaks not of God's Law's, as if many of them, but of God's law as a single whole. When a person commits murder, he breaks God's law. When a Christian lets corrupting speech that tears down another person come out of his mouth, he breaks God's law.

Most will acknowledge that some sins are more serious than others. I would rather be guilty of a lustful look than of adultery. Yet Jesus said that with that lustful look, I have committed adultery. I would rather be angry at someone than to murder that person. Yet Jesus said that whoever murders and whoever is angry with his brother are both liable to judgement. The truth is, all sin is serious because all sin is a breaking of God's Law.

The Apostle John wrote, "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). All sin, even sin that seems so minor in our eyes, is lawlessness. It is not just the breaking of a single command; it is a complete disregard for the law of God, a deliberate rejection of His moral will in favor of fulfilling one's own desires. In our human values of civil laws, we draw a huge distinction between an otherwise "law-abiding citizen" who gets an occasional traffic ticket and a person who lives a "lawless" life in contempt and utter disregard for all laws. But the Bible does not seem to make that distinction. Rather, it simply says sin – that is, all sin without distinction – is lawlessness.

For many morally upright believers, the awareness of personal sin has effectively disappeared from their consciences. But it has not disappeared from the sight of God. All sin, both the so called respectable sins of the saints, which we too often tolerate, and the flagrant sins of society, which we are quick to condemn, are a disregard for the law of God and are reprehensible in His sight. Both deserve the curse of God.

If all of this seems too harsh, let me say that there are many godly, humble people who are happy exceptions. In fact, the paradox is that those whose lives most reflect the fruit of the Spirit are usually those who are most keenly aware of and groan inwardly over these so-called acceptable sins in their own lives.

Happily, Paul goes on in Gal 3:13 to assure us that Christ has “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,” that is, all who trust in Him as their redeemer. But the fact still remains that the seemingly minor sins we tolerate in our lives do indeed deserve the curse of God. This may all seem like a dark bleak picture of our society as a whole and of our conservative church community. But God has not forsaken us. For those who are true believers, God is still our heavenly Father, and He is at work among us to call us to repentance and renewal. Part of His calling is to lead us to the place where we do see the sins we tolerate in our own lives so that we will experience the repentance and renewal we need.

Sin is much more than wrong actions, unkind words, or even those evil thoughts that we never express. Sin is a principle or moral force in our heart, our inner being. Our sinful actions, words, and thoughts are simply expressions of the sin residing within us, even in those of us whose hearts have been renewed.

The apostle Paul calls this principle the flesh or sinful nature. This principle, called the flesh, is such a reality that Paul sometimes personifies it like in today's scripture text in the book of Romans chapter 8.

Here is the truth that we need to lay to heart. Even though our hearts have been renewed, even though we have been freed from the absolute dominion of sin, even though God's Holy Spirit dwells within our bodies, this principle of sin still lurks within us and wages war against our souls. It is the failure to recognize the awful reality of this truth that provides the fertile soil in which our "respectable" or "acceptable" sins grow and flourish.

We could also classify these as "subtle sins". They are crafty, insidious, wily, treacherous. That is the sense of subtle in the concept "subtle sins". These "respectable" sins are subtle in the sense that they deceive us into thinking they are not so bad, or not thinking of them as sins, or even worse, not even thinking about them at all! Some of our refined sins are so subtle that we commit them without even thinking about them, either at the time or afterward. We often live in unconscious denial of our "respectable" sins.

I myself, reflecting back on my life, can say I was usually an obedient child, a model teenager, a trusted employee, and a conscientious husband and father.

In fact, I've been on the staff of a Christian ministry for nearly 20 years. However, in my past, I have struggled with pride, been disrespectful in many ways to my wife, I have gossiped, spoken critically of others, harbored resentment, become impatient, lashed out in anger, acted selfishly, failed to trust God in difficult issues in life, succumbed to materialism, and even let video games and my favorite sport golf become an idol. I have to say with Paul that I am the foremost of sinners.

I am a great sinner, but I have a great Savior. That is my only hope. That is the only remedy for my sin, and it is your only remedy as well.

We who are believers tend to evaluate our character and conduct relative to the moral culture in which we live. Since we usually live at a higher moral standard than society at large, it is easy for us to feel good about ourselves and assume that God feels that way also. We fail to reckon with the reality of sin still dwelling within us.

Consider that every sinful thought, word and deed we do is done in the presence of God, heard the words David in Psalm 139:1-4

Oh LORD, you have searched me and know me!

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

You discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down

And are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,

Behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

God knows our every thought; He hears our words before we even speak them and sees our every deed. He even searches our motives, for Paul wrote that when the Lord comes, He “will disclose the purpose(motive) of the heart.” 1COR4:5

This means that all of our rebellion, all of our despising of God and His law, all of our grieving His Holy Spirit, all of our presuming on His grace, all of our sin, is done before Him as He sits on His royal throne.

It does not matter whether our sin is scandalous or respectable, all our sin is sinful, only sinful, and altogether sinful. Whether it is large or small in our eyes, it is heinous in the sight of God. God forgives our sin because of the shed blood of Christ, but he does not tolerate it.

Instead, every sin that we commit, even the subtle sin that we don't even think about, was laid upon Christ as He bore the curse of God in our place. Christ suffered because of our sins.

That is the bad news about our sin, and as you can see, it is really bad. How do you respond? Will you deflect it onto other people whom you see to be sinners? Or does this view of our sin cause you to want to fall on your knees before God in repentance and contrition over the sins you have tolerated in your life? If the latter is true, then you are ready for the good news, and it really is really, really good.

Romans 8:1 today's text, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"

Listen to this in Romans 7 verse 14: Paul says, "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal." (I am a man of the flesh).

I know you are saved; you are born of the Spirit; you have spiritual nature, and spiritual lives, but you are still walking around in a human body. This is what Paul is saying, "The law is spiritual."

The law is a spiritual law, which comes from the Spirit of God and reaches to the spirit of men. The law requires not just outward holiness and outward deeds and outward righteousness of action, but the law is a spiritual law that demands inward holiness of attitude.

We can't tie it to a bunch of do's and don'ts having to do with the flesh; the law is spiritual; listen to it: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus never said that about any other two commandments, about any other commandment, or about any other portion of Scripture. "On these two hang the whole law of God." The law is spiritual.

It's because the law is spiritual; God's law is spiritual. What is Paul's response to this when he comes face to face with this law? He says, "The law came and I died." It killed him; the law didn't make Paul go around bragging on himself, it killed him.

Then he goes on in verse 15: He says, "I do what I don't approve of and what I should do I don't do. I should love God with all my heart, soul, and mind, but I don't. The very things I hate are the things that I do, say, and think," do you?

He says in verse 18: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, (in this natural man), dwelleth no good thing. To will is present with me but how to perform that which is good I find not."

Wouldn't you like to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself? I would love to do that wouldn't you? He said, "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good (perfect, that is all that God can be satisfied with, perfection) I find not."

Paul said; "I'm not trying to find out how to perform the rules and regulations of certain churches in certain cities, I'm trying to find out how to perform that which is perfect. I can't find it in me but I can find it in Christ, the object of my faith. I can't find it in here (my heart); I have looked in vain."

Then, he says this; Paul admits to being a man with two natures; he admits to it. He said, "I have a holy nature that delights in holiness after the inward man. I have another nature, an old nature that has no goodness, no righteousness, and constantly wars against my new nature."

Paul confesses to being a man with two wills, the will to do God's will, and the will to do his own will; that's the believer's conflict.

He goes from there to the believer's confidence. If you keep looking for salvation in yourself and righteousness, and acceptance with God, if you keep looking in your own heart, to find any reason for God's mercy, you are going to be in trouble for the rest of your life. If you look honestly, you will be shocked at what you find.

Here's the believer's confidence in Romans chapter 8:1: He went through all of this admitting his natures, his wills and his conflicts. He said, "There is, therefore *now*, no condemnation to them who are in Christ," no condemnation.

Does this mean that there is no guilt, no judgment, no charge and no condemnation to those in Christ? That's right! We will never be called to account for our sins, because Christ died for our sins.

Ro 8:32-35 says “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Now; this is a blessing that is not going to be revealed in eternity; it is ours right now. Our conflict is now so we need the mercy now. Our conflict is now so we need the grace now. Our warfare is now so we need the comfort now.

We don’t need it at the judgment; we need it now, right now. John said, “Beloved, now, we are children of God,” (right now) it does not appear what we shall be. But when he shall appear we are going to be like him.”

All of our sins, past, present, and future were laid on Christ. Isa 38:17” In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.” That is, they will be remembered no more.

Ps 103:12 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. What a blessing! Yes, and here is the key! Listen to what Paul says: “There is therefore, now, no condemnation; (here is the key), to them who are in Christ Jesus.”

How did they get there? How did they get in Christ Jesus? You see; every blessing is in Christ. God’s vested everything in His Son; everything is in Christ.

First of all: By God’s grace, by Gods purpose!

“He chose us in Christ; before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. He predestinated us unto the adoption of children.” That’s how we got in Christ; God put us there.

Secondly: We got in Christ by the Holy Spirit’s work! He baptized us into the body of Christ by one spirit. We are born of the Spirit of God. We were put in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit’s supernatural, irresistible, effectual work.

Thirdly: We are in Christ by faith. Christ dwells in me by His Spirit and I dwell in Him by faith. Coming to Christ and believing on Christ is the same thing. So, “there is no condemnation;” the believer’s conflict is real, the believer’s Savior; He’s real and we are in him and we are complete in Him.

“Christ is in you the hope of glory.” We get everything from Christ. “He is the head and we are the body. Without him we can do nothing.” We are nothing; we perish; it is all in Him. You are not a separate entity in God’s kingdom; you are in Christ or you are not in His kingdom.

Here is the believer’s conduct: He says; “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”