The Church – saints and forgiven sinners

There are people in the church who have been guilty of every sin known to mankind – adultery, fornication, wife abuse, child molestation, robbery, murder, drug addicts, alcoholics, not to mention those who have given in to lust, greed, hate, pride, etc.

The church is not made up of perfect people - it is a hospital for sinners, composed of people who have been made righteous by the blood of Christ. The difference between people in the church and people outside the church is not that those in the church are “saints” and those outside the church are “sinners” - it is simply that those inside the church are sinners saved by grace, while those outside the church are unsaved sinners.

I. The church is made up of sinners

1 Corinthians 6:9–11: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

In this context, Paul was teaching the Corinthian church to live righteously. In verses 9 and 10, Paul named ten sins (but they are not the only ones) that will keep people out of heaven. Anyone participating in the sins common in the world will “not inherit the kingdom of God.” Since “inherting the kingdom of God” is the equivalent of going to heaven, “not inheriting the kingdom of God” means going to hell!

Galatians 5:19–21: “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

II. We must realize

The practices listed are all sins. Whether people want to admit it or believe it, these are sins because God said they are sins. If we believe the Bible, we must have the same view of these behaviors that God has of them.

These sins are equal in their eternal consequences. The earthly consequences of some sins may be worse than others, but the ultimate consequences of all sins are the same. Some of the most immoral people in the world will commit adultery and fornication, but condemn homosexuality. However, those who practice adultery and fornication are just as lost as those who practice homosexuality.

Some members of the church at Corinth had been guilty of these sins. Paul went on to make this shocking statement: “Such were some of you” (1 Corinthians 6:11a). The church in Corinth included people who had been thieves, revilers, idolaters, adulterers, and homosexuals, etc.

It is important to recognize the fact that anyone - not just the “moral” or “respectable” person - is eligible to enter the church, Christ’s hospital for sinners.

Jesus came to save the lost (Luke 19:10 – “For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost”).

He ate with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2: “Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!”).
Jesus loves the lost - all the lost, that’s why everyone is welcome in the New Testament church - no matter what kind of sinner he had been before! \( \text{Hebrews 12:15} \) – “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God…”

III. Sinners in the church have been saved

After saying, “And such were some of you,” Paul added “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 6:11b).

Paul stated the same idea in three ways. Why? For emphasis! Perhaps Paul was doing much the same thing that an excited child might do after winning a game when he says, “I won! I won! I won!”

Paul was saying, “Your previous condition was terrible! You were lost, but now you are saved! You are saved! You are saved!”

Each of Paul’s three expressions have a different connotation. “\text{But you were washed}” explains what happened to the Christians’ sins. When they were washed, their sins were washed away by the blood of Christ.

Revelation 1:5 – “…To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood…”

This washing occurred when the Corinthians were baptized (Acts 18:8 – “And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized”). The idea of “washing” is used frequently in the New Testament with reference to water baptism:

Acts 22:16 – “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Titus 3:4-5: “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit…”

“You were sanctified” means “you were set apart.” Having been cleansed from their sins, these people were set apart for God’s service; they became “saints” or “sanctified” ones (1 Corinthians 1:2 – “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours…”).

“You were justified” means “you were made right” with God. Before they were saved, they had been God’s enemies, under His wrath and sentenced to death. Now that they had been justified, they were reconciled with God and had God’s approval:

Romans 5:1 – “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ…”

Romans 5:10 – “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

A remarkable change had taken place in the lives of these sinners! They had been transformed; their condition had been changed! They were no longer lost; they were saved: washed, sanctified, and justified!
IV. Paul's Message to Us

We can rejoice that the sinners in the church at Corinth had been cleansed - but some may be asking, “What does the text mean for me today?” Simply this, if they could be saved, we can be saved! No matter what we have done, no matter how sinful we have been, we can be saved!

If those who murdered Christ could be saved on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23, 36–41), if Paul—after persecuting the church and recognizing himself as the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15) could be saved, and if the thieves, idolaters, and homosexuals at Corinth could be saved, then we can be saved!

V. Sinners must repent

Notice the tense of the verb in [1 Corinthians 6:11] - “Such were some of you.” “Were” is past tense. In other words, the adulterers were no longer committing adultery; the idolaters were no longer worshiping idols; the thieves were no longer stealing; and the homosexuals had quit practicing homosexuality! That’s the true meaning of repentance! Whatever our sin, repentance means that we must quit doing it – stop the deliberate sinning!

VI. The church should be a support group

The church is a mutual support group that should be offering advice, encouragement, and accountability for people who are trying to change their lives. We all are part of this support group, trying to help one another overcome our weaknesses!

We are all tempted to sin (greed, immorality, lying, anger, chemical abuse, unforgiveness, etc). However, together, we can keep from slipping back into the sinful lifestyles we formerly practiced.

Christ accepts sinners, but He does not tolerate sin! Just as there is a danger of thinking that because of God’s wrath, we can sin so much we cannot be saved, there is also the danger of thinking that because of God’s grace, we can keep on sinning and God will always forgive. God will forgive, but we must repent!

VII. You do belong

Maybe you have been reluctant to become a member of the church because you feel inferior. You may think you are too sinful, not good enough to be a Christian. You may be afraid you would not be welcomed into the church. Perhaps, when you attend the worship services, you think, “I just don’t belong here.”

If so, I have news for you. You do belong in the church. To enter the church, you need to be washed and sanctified and justified just like the Corinthians were! This happens when we obey the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Perhaps you have entered this hospital, but you continue to live as you always did. If this is the case, you need to turn your life around, repent, confess your sins, let God forgive you!

VIII. How not to get forgiveness from God

Don’t beg. You don’t have to beg God to forgive you. He already wants to forgive you. God wants to forgive you more than you want to ask for forgiveness, because He is a forgiving God.

Psalm 86:5 – “O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.”
Don’t bargain. Don’t say, “If You’ll just forgive me, I’ll never do this again.” You don’t have to bargain with God to get His forgiveness. You don’t have to make deals with God.

Don’t bribe. Don’t say, “God if You’ll forgive me, I promise to do a bunch of good things. I’ll go to church, I’ll do this or that…”

IX. How to get forgiveness from God

Repent of your sins (Acts 8:22 – “Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts…”).

Confess your sins to God and ask for forgiveness! (Proverbs 28:13 – “You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up, then God will show mercy to you.”) (GNB)

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

If we freely admit/confess our sins, God will forgive us. To admit or to confess means to speak the same thing about your sin that God says about it. I say, “God, You’re right, it’s wrong.”

God wants us to come clean and admit that wrong is wrong, that we are “guilty as charged.” He wants us to “own up” to our sins. That’s what it means to confess - agreeing with God.

Our sins have built a barrier between us and God. Confession restores our fellowship. In confession we open our lives to the healing, reconciling, restoring, uplifting grace of Jesus Christ who loves us in spite of ourselves.

Psalm 32:5 - “Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”

When we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable. He forgives our sin and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil. He freely takes away our sins. We don’t deserve it, we don’t earn it, and we can’t work for it. It’s free.

Also, when God forgives, He forgives instantly. He doesn’t wait! He never makes us wait or makes us suffer for a while. Humans do that, but God doesn’t do that. The moment you confess, you’re forgiven. He wipes the slate clean and makes it like we have never done anything wrong.

Also, when God forgives, He forgives completely. His forgiveness is not in stages; it's not partial; it is absolutely complete. He wipes our sin completely out.

You say, “I could never be forgiven for what I’ve done, I’ve gone too far, I’ve sinned too much, there is no hope for me, there is no way that God could ever love me or forgive me.”

You’re wrong! There is no sin too bad, or too great, that God won’t forgive, every single time! The only sin God can’t forgive is the one that is not confessed. If we can truly repent, God will surely forgive no matter what: (Isaiah 1:18 - “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

“No matter how deep the stain of your sin is, God can take it out and make it as clean as freshly fallen snow.”
You may have a hard time believing in God’s forgiveness. You may think “After all I've done, I don’t think anyone can completely forgive me.” Maybe you feel that you have done such horrible things or hurt people so badly that there’s no way your sins could ever be blotted out entirely. Even if you could be forgiven, who could ever forget the things you have done?

**God can!**

**Psalm 103:12** – “He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.”

**Hebrews 8:12** – “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

X. Grace upon Grace

God answers the mess of life with one word: **Grace!** Grace is simply another word for God’s reservoir of strength and protection. It doesn’t come to us occasionally or sparingly but constantly and aggressively, wave upon wave - “Grace upon grace!”

We barely regain our balance from one breaker, and then bam, here comes another: “From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another” (John 1:16).

God has enough grace to pardon every sin, solve every dilemma, wipe away every tear, and answer every question. It’s more than we deserve and greater than we imagine!

**Ephesians 2:4-7**: “But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.”

As Christians, we are saved by God, seated with Christ, gifted, equipped, and commissioned by God. We are not who Satan says we are, we are who God says we are: **spiritually alive, heavenly positioned, connected to God, a billboard of mercy, an honored child.** That is the grace of God!!!!

God’s grace comes after you – it’s time you let it catch you! It may be time for you to take a “bath” in God’s grace, to learn to be at ease in the peace of Jesus!

*It’s time to live forgiven!*