

## WHICH SINNER DO YOU PREFER?

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Scandals arise on every hand. Reputations that seemed to glitter suddenly fall to the ground. Careers that seemed so polished and perfect are found to have been tainted. Men and women are exposed! They are sinners! They have been fools to think they are perfect! "As it is written, 'None is righteous; no, not one.'" (Romans 3:10) How many are righteous?? NONE!

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

It seems that most of us try to hide our sins! Well, why wouldn't we? Most of us are ashamed of what we've done. We don't want the world to know about our sins! And there are things we didn't do that we should have done. We can be ashamed of cowardly non-action also! There is plenty of shame that we can heap upon ourselves! So friends, why do you think you are better than someone else?

But, perhaps we think we **are** better than other sinners because we have come out of the cesspool. We don't sin as much as we used to. We cleaned up our lives a little. We have become respectable. We have gotten rich; we live in better places and drive better cars. We are the elite. We, like those still in sin, have become "unrepentant." Where once we were ashamed we now hide our shame because we believe we have been forgiven. Or, at least, we have forgiven ourselves! And we **should** forgive ourselves as far as God has forgiven us, but we should never forget that we too were sinners.

Jesus' apostle Paul reminds God-forgiven Christians that God expects from them a circumspect life. And what is a circumspect life? This is a life that considers all aspects of our lives. It is a lifestyle characterized by humility and repentance because we believe in the big picture. We believe in judgment Day and eternity. We see our lives on the background of eternity and the God of eternity.

So, "You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself [that will appear] on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. [God] will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, [God] will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality." ([Romans 2:1-11 ESV](#))

Ah, there it is! Partiality! Whereas God shows no partiality, that is exactly what we do; humans show partiality! So, which sinner do you prefer? That becomes the question!

If you are choosing a government leader: which sinner will you prefer? If you are choosing a Senator: which sinner do you prefer? If you are choosing a judge; which sinner do you prefer? If you are choosing a President; which sinner do you prefer? If you are choosing a preacher; which sinner do you prefer? If you are choosing a wife; which sinner will you choose? If you are choosing a husband; which sinner will you choose?

Yes, there are choices to be made! But don't think that the one you prefer is NOT a sinner! He or she may NOT be a sinner like others you know, but don't think that person is without sin. The question becomes: "what has that person done with his/her sin?" Is he ashamed of his sin? Has he turned away and rejected his former behavior? Is she attempting to get out of the sinning business? By patient well-doing, are they now seeking for "glory, honor, and immortality"? Have they changed?

Everyone can change. In fact, everyone should change. It is called "repentance". One day, Jesus' apostle Paul told some very elite individuals, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance [such as idols, icons, statues], but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. [God] has given proof of this to everyone by raising [that man] from the dead." ([Acts 17:30-31 NIV](#))

When the apostle made that statement about the resurrection from the dead, there were two reactions. Most of those elite philosophers laughed and sneered. But for others curiosity was ignited! They said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." When Paul left the arena "certain [ones of the elite] joined themselves to [Paul] and believed; among whom were Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." ([Acts 17:34 MKJV](#))

These curious people who followed Paul down Mars' Hill became followers of Jesus Christ because Jesus had the cure for their acknowledged sins. Jesus had forgiveness. Justified forgiveness! Jesus on the cross justified God's forgiveness in all ages. By following the apostle of Christ those seekers learned that God forgives people who seek "glory, honor, and immortality" even with the knowledge of their sins. Those elite people who followed Paul were eager for change; they wanted forgiveness. They were sinners who were eager to put their past behind them. They were ready to seek God by "well doing." They were ready to repent.

Even after a person becomes a Christian by faith, repentance, and baptism, he is supposed to remember how far he has come. That means that this new Christian acknowledges the sins of his past. The Christian knows he was once "dead in the trespasses and sins in which [he] once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in [all] the sons of disobedience..." All Christians "once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and [we] were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." ([Ephesians 2:2-3 ESV](#))

Remembering **that** sinful life engenders gratitude in our hearts! That's right! We are full of thanksgiving because God was "rich in mercy." Because of His great love, God loved sinners and "made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Christ and seated us with Christ in the heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ." ([Compare Ephesians 2:4-6 ESV](#))

The apostle Paul put it this way when he wrote to the Colossian Christians, "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." ([Colossians 1:11-14 ESV](#))

Yes, friends, true Christians do not forget the sinful life that we left behind, but we do not want to go back to that! We are grateful for the salvation that God has granted us! But, there are many believers in Christ through the centuries, and even today, who have turned their back on serving Jesus. That's right. Even while they **SAY** they are serving Christ, they are **NOT** serving Christ. They are serving themselves! And they are deceiving themselves!

In the first century there were Christians who were like this. They slipped away from Christ. We call it backsliding! Jesus' apostle Peter describes a terrible situation when many Christians would follow the sensuality of false teachers.

Peter says that the false teachers, "in their greed,... will exploit" other Christians. Peter says these exploiters are "like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed." Peter says that they are always "blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant..." Those backsliders counted it "pleasure to revel in the daytime." Peter says "They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, greedy for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!" (2 Peter 2:12-14 ESV)

And all of this sin Peter predicted it would be IN the church of Christ. Peter prophesied that "Speaking loud boasts of [foolishness], they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2 Peter 2:18-22 ESV)

Who will we prefer? Who will we listen to? Who will we follow? Will we listen to and follow the Christian who has gone back into sin? Or will we listen to and follow the Christian who is still humbly repentant, and is now pursuing "glory, honor, and immortality" in the kingdom of heaven?

Jesus' apostle John wrote this: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

By this we may know that we are in him: whoever **says** he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (1 John 1:6 - 2:6 ESV)

Do we prefer a leader who has NOT changed his ways, or are we looking for someone who HAS changed their ways? Which sinner will we prefer?

Will we prefer a person who acknowledges sin and demonstrates that he or she is now seeking "glory, honor, and immortality."