

Text: [1 Timothy 1:12-17 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: October 5, 2025

Title: “Saint and Sinner”

Theme: We are all sinners called to be saints by the grace of God.

1

The closest thing I have to a workshop is the parsonage garage
So if it's nice on a Friday or Saturday you might drive by the
church and see me working on something with the doors up
or out in the driveway

I like to do woodworking as a way to relax and do something
creative

But, you know, with any type of project
Sometimes things don't go your way
You don't measure right and you cut too short
The tool slips and you leave a mark
You find that you don't have the right fasteners to finish the job

Usually, one thing like that is fine – no big deal
But every once in a while, the whole day is like that
Where nothing is going right

And the thing you wanted to be relaxing turns out to be an
exercise in frustration
It's at that point where you might hear some choice words out of
my mouth
Typically it's only after I've let it fly that I remember the garage
door is open and that someone may be in the parking lot

It's a hazard of living on church property
You just never know when someone might overhear an excitable
pastor cussing a blue streak

2

Today we're talking about saints and sinners
You probably know that from a biblical perspective, we're all sinners –

“All have sinned & fallen short of the glory of God” is a familiar phrase from Romans 3:23

But what you may not know is that there are 60+ instances where the word “saint” shows up in the King James to refer to regular old Christians

The Greek that's being translated is literally “holy ones”

Before there was a process to canonize anyone, before the Church required two documented miracles

Before anyone even spoke of the gospel writers as SAINTS
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

And long before New Orleans had an NFL franchise

We talked about members of a church as “the saints”

So you might send a letter – and Paul did – to “the saints in Medford”

Now, I'm guessing most of you don't think of yourselves as saints
If anything, I bet you're much more likely to think about yourself as a sinner

Because it feels safer to do that

To call yourself a sinner feels more grounded, more humble

Actually, I'm not sure I want to be around anyone who considers themselves a saint

But I've also gone through seasons where I very much felt the
weight of my sin
And I spent a lot of time dwelling on all the ways I was falling
short & "disappointing" God

That was no picnic either
I have a tendency to be self-critical anyway
So when you layer in a theological conviction that you're just no
good
It can be really debilitating, and rob you of your joy

So there are dangers in applying either one of these terms to
ourselves without some real care and thought taken for what
they do and don't mean

3

You may identify with the word "sinner" more than the word "saint"
but you'll probably never identify with it more than Paul did
As we read in today's passage from 1 Timothy

Now, I should clarify something – most scholars today don't
attribute 1 Timothy to Paul the Apostle
Most believe it was a letter written after his death, in his name, in
order to give weight to advice the early church desperately
needed to hear
If you're interested, I can tell you more later about why people
think that¹
I'll leave some notes in the manuscript I post on the website

But regardless, 1 Timothy is still considered part of the Pauline
writings
Because it reflects the *character* and *concerns* of Paul, even if not
written by him

And one thing he says here, “I’m the biggest sinner of all,” is
definitely in keeping with statements Paul makes elsewhere
He never hid that he did wrong
In 1 Corinthians, he says “I don’t even deserve to be considered
among the apostles because I persecuted the Church” (15:9)

And yet he can confidently say that he stands in Christ’s grace
Because “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”
And that the Lord’s favor has been poured out over him in
faithfulness and love
That Christ even went so far as to appoint him to this ministry of
evangelism

That’s how big the grace of God is
Big enough to turn lives around
To send us running toward things we used to run from
And vice versa

4

You may be tempted to think that your imperfect past –
or even imperfect present – somehow disqualifies you from living
in God’s love
That’s just not true
We serve a God of second and third and fourth and fifth chances

Being in Christ means we are never defined by our worst
moments
You can’t out-sin the grace we receive through the cross
It’s just not possible

And that’s why I like the phrase we find in 1 Corinthians 1:2
“To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, CALLED to be saints...”
(NRSV)

BECAUSE Christ has redeemed us
And because IN redeeming us Christ has made us holy – that's
what "sanctified" means
Now we're called to live like it – to STOP living like sinners and
START living like saints!

But transformation is always a *process* rather than a destination
We're on the way, but even at our best, we've never quite arrived

We aren't considered God's saints because we're perfect
It's because we keep at it
Faithfulness is the thing that matters

It's like what we read in 1 Timothy: God has *endless* patience with
us – absolutely *endless*
As often as we make a mistake, Jesus stands ready to forgive
The only question is: what did we learn?

5

Just like with Paul, the Church LOVES the story of a notorious
sinner who's now all about doing God's work
We love those stories of Christ's outrageous grace

So much so that I observe that people who have ALWAYS been
part of the church – who grew up in the church
Sometimes, strangely, find themselves feeling *less than*
At least in the company of *certain* kinds of Christians
Because they just don't have the dramatic conversion story
people love to hear
But that doesn't make your faith any less authentic

The point of all this is: whether you've been here 5 minutes or 50 years

The church is the place where sinners gather to learn from the examples of the saints

But notice there aren't any halo-polishing stations in the lobby
Because there's always more for us to unpack
Sin is pernicious that way

It's in our human nature to do all we can to BLESS it without ADDRESSING it

The German anti-Nazi theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned us about "cheap grace" that requires nothing from us
A few "I'm sorry's," a couple prayers, and we move on
Having changed nothing, having learned nothing

A right relationship with God requires us to take ownership of sin
Not for the purpose of trying to make things right with God on our own – of *earning* forgiveness – we can't do that
But rather for the purpose of *learning* something

If you're a white person and a co-worker calls you out for a racist assumption or comment you made in a meeting
You can jump right away to asking for forgiveness from your black colleague
But if you don't also pass through the discomfort of unpacking exactly how your comment hurt them
Then it's just cheap grace – and it benefits no one – because you haven't learned anything
Cheap grace leaves sinners right where they are – as sinners

I think saints are just people who are taking the lessons they
learned from their mistakes to heart
Who take the ways they hurt people –
Or even ways people have hurt them –
And learn from them so they don't do it to someone else
By the grace of God

Because that's really what it's about
The grace of God
Which has the power to turn sinners to saints
Even you and me

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ Some reasons why scholars believe this about 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, also known as the Pastoral Epistles: 1) the style and sentence structure differ dramatically from the letters that are universally attributed to Paul (Romans, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon); 2) there are a number of words in these letters that appear nowhere else in the New Testament and are otherwise not part of Paul's typical vocabulary; 3) the letter uses some formulations that would suggest it was written later. For example, instead of "faith," which is a concept discussed extensively in Paul's letters, the Pastorals talk about "the faith" as an established body of teaching. Scholars are also quick to point out that pseudepigraphy was not necessarily frowned upon or dismissed as fraudulent in ancient times.