

I Am a Sinner Saved by Grace

Brothers and sisters who come for counseling have many different problems, as well as a variety of perceptions of their problems.

With all we are patient. With the love of Christ we gather information and then communicate the life-changing truths of the Word with personal care. Some are weak in faith or knowledge of the Word; they need to learn about God's love, faithfulness, power and involvement in their difficulties. Others are faint-hearted and need the hope given in God's Word.

Some who are unruly (the problem is sin) acknowledge their sin and seek help from the Word, "Just tell me what the Bible says to do and I will seek to do it." Others who are unruly do not acknowledge their sin. They perceive the problem and solution differently. Statements such as "Can you change my spouse?" "God wants us to be happy" "I can't handle this" and "My kids are impossible" are often heard.

The preceding groups are ready and eager to hear how Scripture applies to them and what they must do. For this final group there will be two parts to counseling: 1) Convincing them of their own sin and 2) showing them what Scripture says about the sin and how the change (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

So how can we convince someone sin exists in his or her life? The theology of man, the theology of sin. Every true Christian is a sinner saved by grace (Romans 3:23-26, Ephesians 2:8-9). We are justified (Romans 5:1-2) but sin still exists in us. Our occupation until we are glorified is sanctification: putting off sin and putting on righteousness (Ephesians 4:22-24, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Romans 6:10-14, Galatians 5:16-17). The Scriptures clearly teach that each believer still has sin and that changing to become more like Christ is our purpose as long as we are here on earth. No one disputes that the Bible contains these truths of theology.

Where would a believer get the idea that they don't sin or that their sin is insignificant? Pride is a common source. When man compare themselves favorably to others rather than to God they lose sight of their sin. Psychology is another source of error. Those who seek to love themselves as "the greatest love," or who work at having high self-esteem often become oblivious to their sins rather than battling against them. Still others embrace the idea that they are victims of the sin of others, which renders them helpless reactors who are destined to sin. None of these ideas can coexist with the theologies of man and of sin.

In such cases, what is the outcome after the counselee realizes his or her own sin? Some terminate counseling (they don't return). They leave with an understanding of the truth of the Word about sin and change. Others refuse to work at sanctification. Others humble themselves before God and repent.

For the latter group, life changes dramatically. They accept responsibility and begin to work at changing. They use the tools God gives to enable victory over sin. Fruit that results in assurance of salvation is born. God is glorified. The counselee becomes an example to all who know him or her. They see God at work in a human life, doing what only He can do.