

1. Defining “Sinner” and “Saint” Biblically

Sinner

- The term *sinner* in Scripture occurs approximately 65 times. It generally refers to those who live apart from God’s law—those who transgress divine law either knowingly or ignorantly.
- The lexical definitions align with this: a sinner is a person who has **voluntarily violated divine law** or one who is unregenerate and separated from God’s righteousness (Webster’s 1828, Strong’s Concordance).
- Examples: Romans 7:5 contrasts life “in the flesh” (sinful nature) before salvation, and Romans 5:19 clearly contrasts the sinful condition inherited from Adam with righteousness from Christ.
- The sinner is often portrayed as one outside the covenant of grace who has not received pardon or new life.

Saint

- The word *saint* appears around 98 times in Scripture and denotes a person who is **set apart, consecrated, and holy** — physically, morally, and spiritually.
- Saints are those who are separated from the world and consecrated to God by covenant and faith in Christ (Easton’s Bible Dictionary).
- This term is not reserved for perfection in practice but for the **positional status** of believers who belong to God and have been justified, sanctified, and set apart (1 Corinthians 1:2, Philippians 1:1).
- Saints are called to live holy lives, reflecting their new identity.

Summary:

Biblical usage establishes that *sinner* describes the unregenerate state — those outside Christ, separated from God, and under condemnation. *Saint* describes the regenerate, justified, sanctified believer who is set apart by God.

2. Key Biblical Passages Commonly Quoted About Believers Being Sinners

These passages are often cited to assert that believers remain sinners in nature or identity. Careful exegesis reveals their true meaning in context and how they relate to the believer's identity in Christ.

Romans 3:10 — “There is none righteous, no, not one”

Context and Meaning:

Paul, addressing both Jews and Gentiles, declares that *all humanity apart from Christ* is under sin and without righteousness (Romans 3:9-20). This universal statement describes humanity's fallen, sinful condition.

Implication for Believers:

This verse diagnoses the natural human state but does not define the believer's **positional righteousness in Christ** (Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Once justified by faith, believers are declared righteous before God.

Jeremiah 17:9 — “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?”

Original Meaning:

This verse describes the *old, unregenerate heart* — the sinful nature deeply rooted in humanity before regeneration.

Challenge for Believers:

God promises believers a **new heart and new spirit** (Ezekiel 36:26), literally removing the deceitful heart. The deceitfulness itself no longer dwells in the believer's true nature.

Where the challenge arises:

The challenge is **the possibility that believers may resist, reject, or fail to fully walk according to the new heart God has given**. Because of human free will, believers can act in ways incongruent with their new identity, opening the door to deception and self-justification.

Practical implication:

The heart, as the seat of will and emotion, remains a battlefield requiring vigilance, surrender, and obedience to God's Spirit and Word (Proverbs 4:23; 2 Corinthians 13:5). The deceitfulness of the *old* heart is gone, but the *challenge* of embracing and living in the *new* heart remains.

Romans 7:14-25 — Paul's depiction of the struggle under the law

Proper understanding:

This passage is best understood as describing the experience of **someone living under the law and in the flesh, not yet walking in the Spirit or fully saved.**

- Paul portrays the **bondage and frustration of a person condemned by the law but powerless to obey it.**
- Romans 8 contrasts this with the freedom and life available to the believer in the Spirit.

Implication:

Romans 7 is not a description of the *Christian's ongoing personal struggle* or identity but a portrayal of the *unregenerate state* and the power of sin under the law.

1 John 1:8-10 — “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves...”

Interpretation:

John emphasizes the necessity for ongoing confession and honest fellowship with God.

- This does **not** mean believers remain sinners by nature or identity.
- It acknowledges the **presence of sin in the believer's experience** (temptations, failures), necessitating confession and cleansing through Christ (1 John 1:9).
- Elsewhere, John teaches that those truly born of God do not *practice* sin habitually (1 John 3:6-9), affirming the new nature apart from sin.

Summary of Section 2

- These key verses either describe humanity's natural, fallen state apart from Christ or the experiential realities that confront believers but do not define their *positional identity* in Christ.
- The believer is declared righteous and holy, no longer under condemnation, possessing a new heart.

- Challenges like the deceitfulness of the heart or sin's presence require vigilance, confession, and reliance on God's Spirit but do not negate the believer's saintly status.
 - Romans 7 portrays pre-conversion bondage, not a Christian's ongoing state.
 - 1 John calls for transparency and confession, not perpetual identification as a sinner.
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3. Biblical Passages Affirming Believers as Saints and Righteous in Christ

The Bible clearly teaches that believers in Christ are no longer sinners by nature or position but are **saints**—set apart, justified, and made righteous through faith in Jesus. Here are key passages affirming this identity:

1 Corinthians 6:11 — “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.”

- This verse highlights a **transformative past event** for believers: they have been washed (cleansed from sin), sanctified (set apart as holy), and justified (declared righteous).
 - These are **definitive spiritual realities**, not merely aspirational states.
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2 Corinthians 5:21 — “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

- Christ's substitutionary sacrifice enables believers to be **imputed the righteousness of God**.
 - This righteousness is **not earned** but received by faith, establishing the believer's **holy standing before God**.
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Romans 6:15-18 — “...you have become slaves of righteousness.”

- Believers have died to sin and **are now alive to God** (Romans 6:11).
 - This passage affirms a **radical positional change**: from slavery to sin to slavery to righteousness.
 - The believer’s **new identity is righteous** and empowered to live accordingly.
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Romans 8:27 — “...those who are children of God.”

- Those who are in Christ are adopted as **God’s children**, a status reflecting intimacy, inheritance, and holiness.
 - This identity is permanent and speaks to their status as saints.
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Hebrews 3:1 — “...holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.”

- Believers are directly addressed as “**holy brethren**,” highlighting their sanctified status and shared heavenly hope.
 - This language emphasizes the believer’s **present reality as saints**.
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1 John 3:7 — “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

- This verse draws a clear line: those who **practice righteousness belong to God and are righteous**.
 - It implies that righteousness is not only positional but evidenced in the believer’s life.
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Revelation 14:12 — “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

- Saints are characterized by **faithful obedience and perseverance**.
 - This confirms that the saintly identity is both a **positional reality and a lived experience**.
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Summary

- The New Testament consistently calls believers **saints** — those who are set apart and righteous by faith in Christ.
 - Justification, sanctification, and adoption are definitive realities that establish the believer’s **holy standing**.
 - While sanctification continues as a lifelong process, the believer’s identity in Christ as a saint is **immediate and secure**.
 - The believer’s call is to live in harmony with this identity through righteous living empowered by the Spirit.
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Great! Here’s **Section 4**: Analysis of Ellen G. White’s Spirit of Prophecy Insights on Saints and Sinners.

4. Analysis of Ellen G. White’s Spirit of Prophecy Insights

Ellen G. White’s writings strongly affirm the biblical distinction between **sinners** and **saints**, emphasizing both the positional reality and the process of character transformation in probationary life.

Clear Distinction Between Sinners and Saints

- “The Eternal God has drawn the line of distinction between the saints and the sinners, the converted and the unconverted. The two classes do not blend into each other imperceptibly, like the colors of the rainbow. They are as distinct as midday and midnight.”
(*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 341.1)
 - This quote stresses a **definite and clear separation** — the saint is not simply a sinner trying to be better but is a transformed, converted person with a new nature.
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Saints Must Be Saints on Earth to Be Saints in Heaven

- “If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now.”
(*The Adventist Home*, 16.2)
 - Character transformation—sanctification—is a **present, active process** that begins at conversion and continues until Christ’s return.
 - The believer’s saintly identity includes both **positional righteousness** and the **practical outworking of that righteousness in daily life**.
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The Role of Justification and Sanctification

- “The garments of Christ’s righteousness cover no soul polluted by sin.”
(*17LtMs, Ms 106, 1902, par. 18*)
 - “Ye are complete in Him, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of Christ by faith.”
(*Signs of the Times, August 22, 1900, par. 8*)
 - These quotes highlight that **justification imputes Christ’s righteousness**, covering the believer completely, but the **believer must also live a life of sanctification to reflect that righteousness**.
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No Middle Ground Between Saints and Sinners

- “No one can then occupy middle ground. Men and women are either saints or sinners, either entitled to a glorious life of eternity, or doomed to eternal death.”
(15LtMs, Lt 131, 1900, par. 20)
 - This affirms the biblical teaching of a **clear-cut division**, rejecting the idea of an intermediate or ambiguous spiritual status.
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Probationary Life as the Time for Becoming Saints

- “No one will be a saint above in the courts of heaven unless he is first a saint in probationary life.”
(12LtMs, Ms 193, 1897, par. 16)
 - The earthly life is a **time of probation and character development**, confirming the importance of responding to God’s grace through faith and obedience.
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Summary

- Ellen G. White echoes Scripture in teaching that believers are either **sinners or saints with no overlap** in their true spiritual nature.
 - Justification and sanctification are both essential parts of the saint’s identity.
 - Character transformation during probation is necessary and cannot be postponed.
 - The saintly identity is both positional and practical—a new nature that manifests in holy living.
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5. Addressing Common SDA Perspectives and Misunderstandings

Within Seventh-day Adventism, as in many Christian traditions, the tension between believers being simultaneously “sinners” and “saints” has led to some widely held beliefs that merit careful biblical examination. This section clarifies key misunderstandings and aligns SDA teaching with Scripture.

The Phrase “All Have Sinned” and Its Interpretation

- Verses such as Romans 3:23 (“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”) state a universal human condition apart from Christ.
 - **Misunderstanding:** Some conclude that all believers remain sinners by nature or position, regardless of justification.
 - **Biblical clarity:** The “all” refers to humanity apart from faith in Christ. Once justified, believers are **no longer counted as sinners but as righteous** in God’s sight (Romans 5:1, 2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - The **past tense** “have sinned” speaks to human history and nature before salvation, not ongoing spiritual identity.
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Distinguishing Position from Experience

- Many SDA believers conflate **positional righteousness** (the believer’s standing before God) with **experiential sanctification** (the believer’s daily walk and struggle).
 - **Positionally**, believers are saints, justified and holy through Christ’s righteousness. Their old self, including the flesh, has been crucified and done away with (Romans 6:6).
 - **Experientially**, believers still live in a body and world affected by sin and temptation, and thus may face struggles—not because the flesh rules them anymore, but because the presence of sin and temptation remains in the environment and human weakness.
 - This struggle is **not the dominion of the flesh**, which is broken, but the tension believers face as they grow in grace and learn to live by the Spirit.
 - Recognizing this distinction **protects assurance of salvation** and biblical identity.
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The Role of Grace, Faith, and Imputed Righteousness

- Adventism rightly emphasizes sanctification but sometimes leans heavily on human effort, causing some believers to feel they remain sinners because they do not attain perfection.
 - **Biblical balance:** Justification by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) is the foundation; sanctification flows from and rests upon that secure position.
 - The imputed righteousness of Christ fully covers the believer, who then lives out sanctification empowered by the Spirit.
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Sanctification: Process and Accomplished Reality

- Adventist teaching affirms sanctification as an ongoing process.
 - However, Scripture also teaches **an accomplished positional reality**—believers are sanctified in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11), set apart and holy.
 - Emphasizing process without recognizing positional sanctification can lead to doubt and legalism.
 - Emphasizing positional sanctification without growth can lead to complacency. Both must be held in biblical tension.
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Practical Implications for SDA Believers

- **Assurance:** Believers can confidently claim their saintly identity, resting in Christ's righteousness, not in their imperfect performance.
 - **Holiness:** The call remains to pursue holiness, cooperate with the Spirit, and grow in character, reflecting the new nature.
 - **Avoiding confusion:** Clarifying biblical terms prevents discouragement and fosters spiritual growth and assurance.
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Summary

- Common SDA misunderstandings about believers as sinners arise from conflating past, positional, and experiential realities.
 - The Bible teaches believers are saints by position and identity in Christ, justified and sanctified, yet engaged in a progressive growth journey.
 - Proper understanding fosters assurance, hope, and a balanced spiritual life rooted in Scripture.
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6. Biblical Theology Summary and Practical Implications

Having examined the biblical definitions, key passages, Spirit of Prophecy insights, and common misunderstandings, we can now summarize the biblical theology of the believer's identity as a saint rather than a sinner, and explore its practical implications.

Believers Are Positionally Saints in Christ

- Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are **declared righteous, justified, and sanctified** (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - They have a **new nature, a new heart, and a new spirit** (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
 - The old self and its dominion, including the flesh, were **crucified with Christ and done away with** (Romans 6:6).
 - This new identity is **immediate, secure, and unchanging in God's sight**.
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The Believer Is No Longer a Sinner in God's Courtroom

- Justification fully removes guilt and condemnation (Romans 8:1).
 - The believer's **righteousness is not their own but Christ's imputed righteousness** (Romans 5:19).
 - Sin's dominion is broken; believers are no longer slaves to sin but slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:15-18).
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Experiential Struggle Does Not Define Identity

- Though positionally saints, believers still face temptation, weakness, and spiritual growth challenges (1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 12:1).
 - The tension arises because believers still live in fallen bodies and a fallen world.
 - This struggle is to be met with **faith, reliance on the Spirit, and obedience**, not despair or identification with the old sinful nature.
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The Call to Live Out the Saint Identity

- Believers are called to **practice righteousness, obedience, and holiness**, reflecting their new nature (1 John 3:7; Hebrews 12:14).
 - Sanctification is both **a position and a process**—God's work in them to conform them to Christ's image (Philippians 1:6).
 - Daily cooperation with the Spirit is essential to manifest the saintly character that God declares.
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Assurance, Hope, and Growth

- Believers can have full **assurance of salvation** based on Christ's finished work, not their fluctuating feelings or failures.

- This assurance fuels **hope and joy**, empowering believers to pursue holiness without fear of losing their standing.
 - Growth in grace is a journey of **progress, repentance, restoration, and transformation**, consistent with their saintly identity.
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Practical Takeaways

- **Claim your identity as a saint** confidently before God and others.
 - **Reject the lie that you are still a sinner by nature or position.**
 - **Commit daily to live by the Spirit** and walk in the newness of life.
 - **Maintain humility and repentance** to guard against self-deception and spiritual pride.
 - **Encourage others with this biblical hope** of new identity and transformation.
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Conclusion

The question of whether believers in Christ are sinners or saints is foundational to Christian identity, assurance, and spiritual growth. Scripture, supported by the Spirit of Prophecy, clearly teaches that those who trust in Jesus are no longer sinners by nature or position but are **saints—set apart, justified, and sanctified through faith**.

While the human experience involves ongoing challenges, temptations, and growth, these do not negate the believer's **new identity as a holy and righteous child of God**. The old self has been crucified with Christ, and a new heart has been given—one that calls for daily surrender and faithful living in alignment with this reality.

Understanding and embracing this biblical truth frees believers from doubt, legalism, and confusion. It invites a life of confident assurance, joyful obedience, and continual transformation. As believers live out their saintly identity, they reflect the glory of Christ and testify to His power to make sinners into saints.

May this truth strengthen your faith, deepen your relationship with God, and inspire a wholehearted pursuit of holiness grounded in the finished work of Christ.