

My mom once told me about the seven year rule. She wanted me to wait at least seven years before telling her and my dad about anything I did when I was younger. That's of course assuming they didn't already know. I don't know that this rule is written down anywhere and I'm pretty sure my mom was joking. The idea was that whatever I had done my parents wanted enough time to pass so they could look at me when I told them and say, that's not what my son would do. And the seven year rule worked for me too. Enough time would pass after doing something that was probably pretty dumb and I could say, that couldn't be me. I wouldn't do something like that now.

God doesn't have a seven year rule. He knows everything the moment we do it, good or bad. We can't deny anything. We can't hide the foolish things until enough time passes where both sides can say, that's not me today. Still less and less people actually believe God sees or cares. Even if he does he doesn't do anything about it so what does it really matter. Each person is only accountable to themselves and because of that don't really have to admit to anything. That couldn't be me.

The Apostle Paul would respectfully disagree. This missionary was writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he set out a very simple law presentation followed by a simple gospel presentation. Paul was presenting in the second lesson to people throughout time that he knew would be saying...

**That couldn't be me
The wicked who won't inherit the kingdom
The justified in Christ**

If you don't finish your plate you won't get dessert. If you don't get your assignment done you won't get recess. If you don't get that project under budget you won't get a bonus. These situations are understandable. Here's another one. People doing wicked things get punished. Here's how Paul said it, **"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?"** A question the readers knew the answer to. Of course the wicked will never inherit something good like that. They're wicked.

What qualifies as wicked though? Paul gives a list of sins that includes some pretty popular ones of Paul's day as well as our day too. **Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.** Ouch! That touches a lot of people and classifies them as wicked. Of course it's not just falling into these one time that Paul was talking about but persistent wickedness people engage in. They don't change, they don't want to change, and plan to without interruption keep on doing whatever they please.

Paul dares to speak clearly about the hot button issues that could be so unclear. What counts as sexual immorality today? A progressive thinking society says sex with someone should be no big deal. Yet the Bible calls sex with someone not your spouse sin. What about homosexuality today? God's Word is clear. Even in today's diverse and tolerant society homosexuality is sin. What about getting drunk, talking bad about someone, being greedy? Greed isn't just an accepted business practice. Drinking until you're smashed isn't just taking the edge off from a long hard week. These are all sins. Commit them and you're a wicked sinner who won't inherit the kingdom of God. Tolerate them, ignore them, or make excuses for them and you're out of sync with God's Word. All sin is sin no matter where it disagrees with God's Word.

But those things aren't me. I read the actions that are wicked and I want to give Paul a high five in agreement. That couldn't be me. I agree, wicked people should never get into heaven. But looking again maybe I have some of those listed sins. Maybe only once. Even if I can say I've never done any of them, Paul's list isn't comprehensive. There would be more sins he could list, surely some of which I had committed. And those sins would make me guilty before God. That couldn't be me? In my sinfulness that is me. I'm wicked and won't inherit the kingdom.

Paul says, that couldn't be you and it couldn't be me. Not now. You aren't defined by wicked actions anymore. **"And that is what some of you were."** God saved you and purified you when it looked like you'd be lost for eternity. God didn't wait for you to stop sinning and then come after you. God came after you while you were still a sinner. He saved you from the depths of sin. He saved you by sending one who wasn't a sinner who could stand in your place. Jesus once and for all took away the sins and the wickedness and the out of sync ideas we have about God's Word. He took it all away on the cross. They're gone. We're free. We live differently from the rest of the wicked world. Because of Christ, that couldn't be me.

The joke is that jail is filled with only innocent people. That couldn't be me, each criminal will say even if they did the crime. Sometimes when something good happens to someone they react in almost the same way. That couldn't be me. Nothing good ever happens to me. When Christ came to justify the world he did just that. He justified everyone, every sinner of every time period of every people on earth. Still some think, that couldn't be me.

Do you look at Paul's list and figure you've kept most of those out of your life? Figure if you haven't done those things then you're okay? Feel like justifying yourself and your actions? You make excuses for sinful behavior. You make up reasons for God to still like you even though you've done some bad things. You're not as bad as other people though. That couldn't be you needing justification from Jesus. Let's not forget that you've done plenty of good things too. But the requirements for getting into God's kingdom go much deeper. You'll never be able to justify yourselves.

Justification is a church word the Bible uses so we should understand the concept. A defendant who has definitely committed the crime knows a guilty verdict is coming. They can't control it. A jury or judge announces that verdict to them. We have definitely committed the crime. We've sinned against God and deserve the guilty verdict. But the verdict is read as not guilty. We've been declared not guilty in God's courtroom. That couldn't be me. I did the sins God accused me of. Justification, the not guilty verdict, comes from an outside source. Jesus is our outside source. He took the guilty verdict on the cross so we could get in exchange the not guilty verdict. So we could be justified.

Now that couldn't be me. I was once a sinner but I've been washed and so have you. We've been purified in a way that only the Holy Spirit can do. We were once sinners but now are justified completely by God's grace. **"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."** God's last will and testament for you recorded in the Bible attaches you to the promises. The connection with the sinful past is broken. What takes its place is a new connection, new life with Christ. That's a connection to the power of God through the gospel of Christ.

So today is it true that that still couldn't be me? That is not you standing wicked before God. Hold up the mirror of God's law to see what you truly are, a sinner. Confess and turn back to Christ in repentance motivated by Christ's love for you. Use God's Word to know what is pleasing so you might live that way. That is you justified by God's grace in Christ when you didn't deserve it. Every day is a new day to renew what you are in Christ.