

## Nominations Now Open for “*Chief of Sinners*”

<sup>15</sup>Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst - *NIV*... (of whom I am chief - *KJV*)  
- 1 Timothy 1:15

If, in some game of *Bible Trivia* the question was posed, “Who was the chief of sinners?” given my competitive juices, I am sure I would answer, “Paul.” After all, he called himself that in the pages of inspired scripture. He accepted God’s grace to the uttermost, but he seemed to live out his days somewhat amazed that this grace could be bestowed on one who had once persecuted Christians even to the point of death. Paul’s brokenness, humility and awareness of his need are examples for all of us. In fairness, however, was he really the “chief of sinners”? What he did, he did from ignorant religious zeal, convinced that he was honoring the God of His forefathers.

Peter, on the other hand, denied that he even knew who Jesus was, and that was after following the Lord as an intimate disciple for three years. He had boasted that even if all the other disciples fell away from Jesus, he never would. Clearly, his fall was disastrous. But, how harsh can we be? Peter was afraid, perhaps, more deathly afraid than any of us have ever been. Jesus was on trial for His life, and the powers-that-be in Jerusalem would have been happy to eliminate any of His followers in one fell swoop. Peter soon realized that he had done wrong. He wept bitterly over his sin, and he did not hide it. What he did, he did at night, out of sight from the other disciples. We would probably not know about his failure had he not himself disclosed it to the early church.

David – now there’s a real candidate for chief of sinners. God had made him a king. God had salvaged this man’s life on numerous occasions. But, the king got too big for the regal britches. He stole a man’s wife, impregnated the woman and orchestrated the death of the man so that he could quickly marry Bathsheba and thus cover up his sordid misdeeds. Of course, we have never known the temptations of absolute power over a nation or idle luxury, and David also repented deeply of what he had done.

Of course, there is something to be said for primacy, that is, for being first. Adam & Eve could be set forth as co-candidates. After all, it was their rebellion that set this whole mess with sin in motion.

But, must the candidates only be biblical characters? What about the person who was raised in the truth and admonition of the Lord only to turn his or her back on Him for the best part of a lifetime before returning to a path of repentance. What of the person who consistently maintains a charade of faith, but sins grievously in the darkness of solitude before once again stepping into the light?

I appreciate Paul’s self-perception that he was “the chief of sinners”, but that is more of a reflection of his astonishment over grace than it is historical reality.

There is a reason no winner needs to be determined as the actual “chief of sinners.” While it would be inappropriate to call the sinless One by such a moniker, Jesus became sin for us (2 *Corinthians* 5:21). Identifying the rightful holder of the title “chief of sinners” becomes a superfluous endeavor, for no sin imaginable is greater than the grace of Him Who was beaten beyond human recognition, Who experienced the abandonment of God under a strange darkened midday sky and Who tasted death as the Father’s judgment for Paul’s sin as well as that of Peter, David, Adam and Eve or you and me.

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