

# From the Pastor's Desk

## The Sinner's Bench

I would like to suggest that all members of Shepherd of the Hills make the same New Year's resolution as we begin 2007. During 2007, let's make the resolution not to sin anymore. By doing this, Shepherd of the Hills will be the only congregation in Cañon City that has no sinners inhabiting the chairs of its sanctuary. We can then advertise ourselves as "The Church of the Pure and Sinless". Those wishing to know what a church without sin looks like would only have to enter our hallowed doors. Of course, for this to work properly, we would have to devise a method for expelling backsliders who break their New Year's resolution. Perhaps, like the early church, we would require those who sin to station themselves outside the entrance of the church and be seated on the sinner's bench where they would publicly confess their sins and beg prayers from the saints as they assemble for Sunday worship. They would be received back inside the sanctuary only after the Council meets to discuss the gravity of their sins and render a judgment whether or not they have been sufficiently purified, so as not to taint righteousness and holiness of the saints.

As good as an idea this is, I doubt it would work. It wouldn't take long for the saints to get proud and have to join the rest of the sinners outside on the sinner's bench to make reparation and beg pardon for their transgressions. At some point, and I am sure it wouldn't take long, the whole congregation would end up outside with no one inhabiting the hallowed walls of the sanctuary. Who would carry on the work of the church? Would the Pastor be in there by himself? Fat chance, just ask Joan. She knows he would probably be one of the first outside begging for mercy and forgiveness!! Such would be the fate of "The Church of Pure and Sinless".

No, thankfully the sinner's benches are located inside the sanctuary where all of us sit. Martin Luther said it best: "The Christian is both saint and sinner at the same time".

Often, sin has been defined primarily as "disobedience" or "breaking God's laws". Although it is that, I would like to suggest we view sin as "separation". Theologian Paul Tillich points out that the root meaning of sin is "separation" or "estrangement". With this understanding, he points out that *sin is being separated from that to which we belong*, namely, God. When we make it our primary concern to live in the Spirit of God, the problem of sin tends to take care of itself.

Our challenge is to go through life with an awareness of God's love and living our lives from this realization. I John 4:7-8 states: "Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten of God and has knowledge of God. The one without love has known nothing of God, for *God is Love*". These are powerful words. When we love, we are living "in" God. During 2007, let's make it our New Year's resolution to live in the love of God. I think we may have a better chance of keeping that resolution, hopefully, most of the time. And, when we fail, let's return to the sinner's bench where we will always - always, be embraced by the love of God.

~ Pastor Bob