

Paul & Popeye

By Tony Guerrero



We **"I AM WHAT I AM."** all remember these immortal words from our favorite one-eyed sailor (although from him, it sounded a little more like, "I yam wud I yam"). Here's a guy with one eye, a permanent distorted grimace, a monstrous chin, an abnormally long torso, short legs and incredibly deformed forearms. Yet somehow, he was able to secure the heart of his true love, Olive Oyl (who was quite a looker herself!). Sure, sometimes he had to compete with the more manly Bluto, but I believe what ultimately won Olive over wasn't Popeye's amazing feats of strength, but rather his confidence—he knew who he was, and that was fine by him.

SO, WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH US?

For those of us in the worship arts, one could almost say we are in the business of "comparing." Few of us manage to avoid comparing ourselves to the success of others, whether it be their talent, their ministry, their music, their opportunity. This kind of comparison can only lead to frustration and burnout.

God calls us to confidence—not in ourselves, but in Him and in who we are in Him. Scripture is full of the warnings against comparison to and wanting what others have:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17 NIV).

"Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load" (Galatians 6:4-5).

DAILY TEST

I often joke with friends when I see someone else's gain—a new car, a new piece of gear, a new opportunity—that "God sure makes it hard not to covet." And, really, that's true. It is difficult to avoid envy. It's built into our sinful nature. But moving from sinful to Christ-like could never be easy (the impossible never is), although it is paramount that we keep trying. As Paul puts it:

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is

behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

SIN BOLDLY

One of the things I love about Paul was that he was so transparent. Romans 7, where we see him admitting that he keeps sinning even though he doesn't want to, is one of the most read passages in my Bible. But what draws me to Paul is that his attitude was basically the same as Popeye's: "I am what I am: I am sinful, I am wretched, I am disgusting." But those admissions never came without also recognizing that "I am loved. I am cared for. I am precious." The fact is, those opposite admissions basically help to define our relationship with the Lord. Without our sin, we wouldn't have needed a Savior, and because we are sinful, Jesus' ultimate sacrifice—a sign of His great love for us—was necessary.

The answer to envy of others isn't found in competition with them. The solution isn't in matching or exceeding their possessions or positions, but rather in admitting who we are—sinful and wretched, but also, so incredibly valuable to God that He would send His own Son to die in our place. If I am that important to the Maker of the Universe, then so-and-so's new guitar becomes quite insignificant, in the big picture.

I AM LOVED

And God is so faithful. Never will we need to question His love for us. Psalm 8:4 is paraphrased in the popular song, "Friend of God": "Who am I that You are mindful of me?" The answer—you are the Lord's. You are His where you are, with what you have. You were given what you have—or what you lack—by Him and for His purposes. Thank Him, even for that which you lack. Bless those who have more than you—send them off with your applause, for yours is to serve your God in and with your life, not theirs.

Thank God that "I am what I am." (Now if only spinach could give me super-human strength!)

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