

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in verse 14 of Romans, chapter 7, I will talk to you about correcting your “I” problem. The big “I.” But before I start the message, I want to make an identification for you. I’ve been pastor here at Green Acres for a little over 7 ½ years and there is a man who is a member of this church who has given me more trouble than anybody else I’ve ever met! I stay angry at him, most of the time. In fact, sometimes, he just makes me so miserable! And I want to identify him this morning. I want him to stand up...in fact he already is standing up, because I’m talking about myself.

The guy I have more trouble with than anybody else is my wife’s first husband! That’s me. Do you know why? Because I really want to be a great husband, a great father, and I really want to be a great pastor! But sometimes my performance doesn’t match up with my desire. So you know, I’ve got a problem. I am a recovering sinner, and I’m told that at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings somebody stands up and says, “Hello, my name is so-and-so, and I’m an alcoholic.” So, “Hello, my name is David Dykes, and I am a sinner.” I’m still recovering, and if you’re a Christian, you are too. I’ve got an “I” problem. I’ve got a sinful nature in me I still struggle with, even though I am a believer. If you don’t, then maybe you’ve learned a secret the apostle Paul and I have not, or maybe you’re just not as sensitive to that tension in your life. I want us to look in Romans, chapter 7, beginning in verse 14, and read about the problem Paul had with the “Big I.” He had an “I” problem and if you care to count you’ll find that in these verses he uses the first personal pronoun (either I, Me, My or Myself) 40 times in this short passage! He really had an “I” problem.

See if you can relate to this personally. “We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual (Underline that word unspiritual. It is actually the word, ‘carnal’ which means fleshly.) sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do...And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who does it but it is sin living in me.” Then, verse 18 contains Paul’s self-evaluation. He says, “I know that nothing good lives in me – that is, in my sinful nature.” (By the way, those words “sinful nature” are the very same as in verse 14 – that word “carnal,” “fleshly,” “in my sinful nature.”) For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do – no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.” Do you have that problem? “If I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war (Paul says this is a conflict) against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” And he is so frustrated. Paul says, in verse 24, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Here’s the answer in verse 25: “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! “So then (he summarizes) I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

Salvation is in three tenses

It is something that happened to you, it is something that is happening to you and it is something that will happen to you. First of all, in the **past tense**, if you are a Christian you have experienced

justification by faith. Justification is when God looks at you because you put your faith in Jesus Christ and he declares you “legally righteous—justified.” That’s not our righteousness, but it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that we’re in. And he says, “You are not guilty.” What does justification do? Justification removes the penalty for sin. Do you know what the penalty for sin is? Death, hell, separation from God forever and ever. When you become a Christian, God says, “The penalty for sin? BOOM. It’s gone!”

But right now, in the **present tense**, we are all involved in a process that’s called ‘sanctification.’ If you don’t know what the word sanctification means, think of the other English word—‘sanitize.’ To sanitize something means to clean it up, remove the germs—and what God is trying to do right now is trying to clean us up, trying to make us more like Jesus Christ, and it is a process. Philippians 1:6 says, “I’m confident that he who began this good work in me is going to keep on completing it until the day of Jesus Christ.” It is a process. What is he trying to do? He is delivering us from the power of sin because sin is still in our lives—even after we’re Christians—and he’s doing the process of delivering us from the power of sin.

Future tense? One day, when we die and meet Jesus Christ, we will experience what the Bible calls ‘glorification.’ That’s when we will be delivered from even the presence of sin because in heaven there is absolutely no presence of sin.

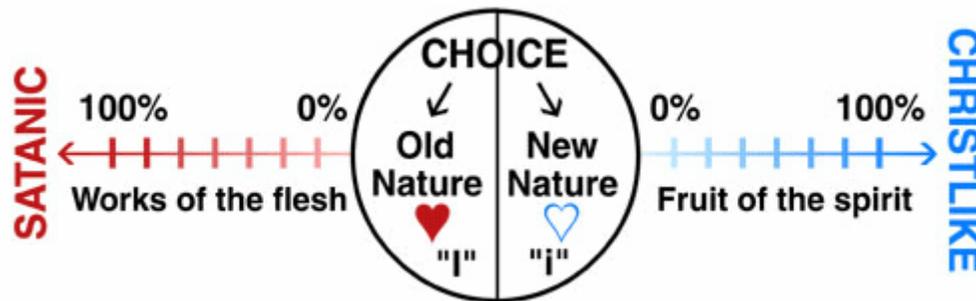
Let’s look at the middle tense, because that’s where we are right now. We are all in that place, right now, where God is trying to work on us to clean us up. One of the biggest problems we need to understand is what Paul wrote about here, “You know, I really want to do the right thing, but I find myself wanting to do the right thing but stumbling and doing the wrong thing.” He says, “I know all these things over here are wrong to do, and I don’t want to do them—but, sometimes I find myself accidentally and occasionally falling into those things.” Now, if you ever have the same kind of problem there’s a word for you from the word of God about how to deal with that. People have debated about whether Paul was writing these words as a Christian or was he describing a person who was not a Christian. I believe without a doubt he’s talking about a Christian. Not only just a Christian—I think he’s describing the heart’s cry of a maturing Christian. Because Paul uses the first personal pronoun, because he uses present tense verbs, he’s talking about ‘right now’ as he’s writing these words. We believe Paul was saved around 35 A.D. and we believe he wrote this letter to the Romans in about 57 A.D. That means he had been a believer for 22 years, and after 22 years of knowing Jesus Christ, and as a maturing Christian, he says, “I still have to deal with and confront sin.”

I. A MATURING CHRISTIAN STRUGGLES WITH SIN

So, I would like to give you three characteristics of a ‘maturing Christian.’ Notice I say “maturing”—it’s not something you ever reach. You never say, “I am a mature Christian” because it’s something you are always striving towards. Paul is saying a *maturing* Christian, number one, struggles with sin. He says, “There’s this war inside my body. There’s this war inside my mind. There’s a war inside my personality. There’s a good nature and there’s an evil nature—and they are fighting against each other.”

Now, I have said a maturing Christian struggles with sin. If you are an immature Christian, if you are someone who is stuck in a backslidden, no growth position, you don’t really struggle with sin. Do you know why? You are not aware of the demand for holiness on your life! So you will just be having a good time and not even sense a desire to obey God in this conflict.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Here’s a little diagram—me and you as a Christian:



1. Old nature (I): Carnal Christian

On one side we have the old nature “Who I was before I became a Christian.” When you become a Christian, you still have that sinful nature that’s there. That’s what Paul says in verse 14: “I am carnal—I am unspiritual.” You notice I’ve put a heart in this diagram. We still have a human heart and the Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9 that the human heart is deceitful above all things desperately wicked; who can know it? Below the heart is a capital “I.” I think Paul’s problem was that he was letting the big “I” control his life. Now if you look at the other side of the diagram, there when you listen to your old sinful nature you’ll find yourself falling into the works of the flesh, what the carnal life exhibits, until you get more and more like the devil. I do not believe a Christian can go all the way out there, because you can’t be born again and end up there, but you can move in that direction if you’re carnal. But again, on the right side of the diagram you see we have a new nature—a heart that’s been cleansed—and I’ve put a lowercase “i” there to designate it is the big “I” that’s been crucified with Christ. It is no longer in control, but is under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The results of the new nature we call the fruit of the spirit. And the more the fruit of the spirit we exhibit, the more Christ like we are.

2. New nature (i): Spirit-filled Christian

Below the diagram we see these two natures. On one side, our old nature represents the carnal Christian. It is a Christian who is living by the impulses and the desires of their flesh. Remember I told you word “flesh” means carnal? We have an English word, “carnivore” which means a flesh-eating animal. When Paul uses the word ‘carnal’ he’s not talking about the actual meat on your bones, he’s talking about the desires of our old fleshy nature. On the other hand, do you know what your new nature is? We call someone who is submitting to their new nature a “spirit-filled Christian,” someone who is not giving in to the demands and the desires of the flesh but who obeys the demands and desires of the Holy Spirit.

This is exactly what Jesus was talking about when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified, with Peter, James and John, and he said, “Fellows, stay there, stay

awake and pray.” What did they do? They *wanted* to stay awake, they *wanted* to pray, but what happened? They fell asleep. Jesus came back and woke them up and said, “C’mon guys, wake up and pray.” Then makes an observation about every one of us, he says, “Truly the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak!” Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever said, “My spirit is willing and wanting to do what’s right, but my flesh—there’s a part of me like a tug of war, pulling back and forth that’s dragging me down.”

Now to further display or illustrate, turn to the book of Galatians, chapter 5, because we’re going to read exactly what happens as we deal with sin as Christians. Galatians 5:16 says exactly what Paul is saying in Romans 7, but instead of talking about it in the first person (as it is happening to him) he is observing it and giving a remedy and a solution. Verse 16 says, “So I say live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature, for the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want.” Isn’t that what he’s saying in Romans 7? You don’t do what you want to do. Galatians, 5:18 says, “But if you are lead by the spirit you are not under law.”

Now you may ask how you can tell which nature of your life is dominant. Well, keep reading in Galatians, verse 19: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious. (Here they are...are any of these in your life?) Sexual immorality, (that’s the general word *pornea*, we get our word pornography from that and it is the general word for sexual disobedience that covers everything from adultery to pre-marital sex to masturbation to homosexuality—any kind of sexual sin.) impurity, (which means anything that’s not clean) debauchery, (the spirit of wanting to party all the time and a desire for pleasure) idolatry (meaning worshiping anything other than God) and witchcraft.

Now you may think witchcraft is some woman dressed in black riding around on a broom, but the word in Greek for witchcraft is the word, *pharmacea*. Does that ring a bell? Pharmacy—pharmacea? The word in the Bible for witchcraft is, “drug abuse.” It may be legal drug abuse or it may be illegal drug abuse but if there is some substance that has control over you, the Bible says that it’s called witchcraft: hatred, discord, (which means you divide instead of unite) dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. That means if it’s a lifestyle, you are not part of the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (against such things there is no law), and now for the summary: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified (that means put to death) the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep on walking in step with the Spirit.”

Now you can go back to Romans 7. I just wanted to illustrate to you from Galatians 5 exactly the meaning of our diagram. There’s a tug of war going on. You can determine by the attributes in your personality which nature is dominating your life.

So, number one. A maturing Christian struggles with sin. Here’s the second characteristic:

II. A MATURING CHRISTIAN SEEKS TO SERVE GOD

It is the desire of a maturing Christian to obey God. The problem is that sometimes a carnal backslidden Christian becomes self-satisfied. They say, “Well, nobody’s perfect, so I’m just going to sin a little bit!” Justifying their actions. But a *maturing* Christian is never satisfied with sin in his or her life. There’s always a hatred of sin, always that tension they live with. An *immature* Christian really doesn’t seek to serve God. Instead they say, “Well nobody’s perfect!” and they accept it and make friends with their sin. Let me ask you three very personal questions:

1. Can you say, “I desire to obey God?”

Look at verse 18 again in Romans 7, Paul says that, “I know that in me, that is within my sinful nature, there is not anything that is good. For I have the desire to do what is good.”

I have good news for you. God doesn’t judge us so much on our performance as He does on the desire of our hearts. God has the ability to read our thoughts, to judge our motives, to know why we do certain things. People can’t do that. I don’t know why you came to church today, but God knows why you came. I just know you came. I don’t know why you did or did not give an offering today, but God knows. You see, God can judge your desires—your hearts—he knows your thoughts. As human beings, we can’t do that. We’re clueless. We can only look at performance, but God looks at the desire. To illustrate that, this week there was one night when I was not a very nice husband and wasn’t as kind to my wife as I should have been and I felt pretty bad about it (as I usually do). So the next day, I was going to meet my wife for lunch. I had every intention in the world of going by and getting her one long-stemmed red rose to take to the lunch, but I just got so busy and I didn’t have time to do it, and so I didn’t give her that rose. But I made the mistake of getting there and saying, “You know, I thought about buying you a rose, but I just didn’t have time!” That was the wrong thing to say! We have a saying that it’s the thought that counts, but it doesn’t count very much, I guarantee you! She, in no way had any appreciation for the ‘thought’ that I had, or of the intent and desire I had to do that—all she saw was ‘no rose!’ You see, God really does have the ability to see our desires and I think many times he judges us on our desires and the direction of our desires. And so, number one, can you say like Paul, “It’s my desire to obey God 100% of the time in 100% of his ways?”

2. Can you honestly say, “I delight when I obey God!”

Look again at verse 22 where he says, “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law.” Here again is a problem with a lot of Christians. A lot of Christians only feel the disgust when they break or disobey God’s laws—and they should feel that. But when was the last time you obeyed God and just said, “Oh praise God, that’s so delightful!” When you write a tithe check, do you say, “Oh praise God—this is so delightful— I’m obeying God!” When you love someone who has been unlovable to you, do you say, “Oh that’s so delightful—I’m obeying God.” When you forgive someone who has hurt you and wronged you do you say “Oh this is so delightful!” A maturing Christian experiences delight when they obey God as much as they experience disgust when they disobey. One final question:

3. Can you say that you determine to strengthen your new nature?

“I determine that every day in every way I’m going to strengthen my new Jesus nature.” What am I talking about? I’ve told this story before, but let’s think about it again: There once was an

American Indian who became a Christian and after he’d been a Christian for a number of years he told a missionary, “I’ve got a problem. It’s as if on the inside of me there are two dogs! One is a black dog who tells me to do wrong and one is a white dog who tells me to do right. These two dogs are constantly fighting for control.” The missionary asked the Indian, “Tell me, which dog wins the fight?” And the Indian said, “It’s the dog that I feed the most.” Do you want your new Jesus nature to overpower your old sinful nature? My advice to you is to “feed it!” Feed it, and starve the other.

For example, in terms of relating to other people, what’s going to feed your Jesus nature more, running around on Saturday night with a crowd that gets drunk, partying, bar-hopping—is that going to feed your Jesus nature? No! That’s going to feed your sinful nature. What’s going to feed the Jesus nature more—gathering with God’s people, studying the word in Sunday school and Bible study? Absolutely. That’s what’s going to feed the Jesus nature. What’s going to feed the Jesus nature, reading and watching pornography or reading the word of God? Obviously reading the word of God. Watching the wrong kind of movies or looking at the right things? You see, there are some things you and I can do to feed the Jesus nature and starve the old sinful nature. If there are any of you who are struggling with that evil, old, sinful nature dominating your lives, you just need to cut off the feed that you are giving to it. A mature Christian is someone who struggles with sin and they seek to obey and to serve God.

III. SURRENDER TO GOD’S SPIRIT

The third thing is the key and the solution in my mind. A maturing Christian surrenders to God’s spirit. Now you may say the only thing I’ve missed so far is the Holy Spirit. I know I read in Galatians 6 where he talks about the old nature and the Spirit but here he doesn’t say anything about the Spirit. Well, I’m glad you noticed that. His problem is, he only talked about “I”—he had an I problem. Ego, self, me, was in control; that “I” has to be replaced with the Holy Spirit of God. He is so miserable about this he says a couple of things.

1. The agony—who will rescue me?

First of all, notice the agony he expresses. He says, “Who will rescue me?” Look at verse 24 where he says, “What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Do you know what he’s talking about when he says, “body of death?” This is so graphic, but amazing. There are many Greek and Roman writers who tell us that back before the time of Christ there were some kings that were so cruel this is the way they would execute prisoners and criminals: they would take a corpse and they would, literally, chain it to the criminal to be executed! Face to face, shoulder-to-shoulder, arm-to-arm, leg-to-leg. They would wrap up a corpse with a living person. Within just a matter of days, the living person would die because the living person couldn’t eat, could hardly walk around, and the putrefaction and the corruption of that dead body would infect the living body! What a terrible way to die! That’s exactly the word Paul is using here when he says, “Who will deliver me from this body of death.” He says, “It’s so awful—it’s as if I’m carrying around a corpse—as if this old life is decaying and is infecting and corrupting me! This is so awful I can’t stand it!” And, by the way, you are never a maturing Christian until you come to that point like Paul did where you say, “This is awful. I can’t stand this tension. I can’t stand this body of death, who’s going to rescue me?” That’s the agony.

2. The answer—Jesus has done it!

But here’s the answer. Verse 25 says, “Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ our Lord.” He’s saying number one; Jesus has done it already. When Jesus died on the cross he died to take away this body of sin. Then he says, “**The Spirit will do it** whenever I allow the Spirit to do it.” The Spirit will keep on putting to death his old, sinful nature. You may say, “I haven’t read anything about the Spirit.” But listen and look at the last verse of chapter 7. I hope you all know that every word of the Bible is inspired but the chapter and the verse divisions were man-made. They weren’t put in for hundreds and hundreds of years afterwards, just so we could look things up easily, and this is one of the biggest mistakes ever made in the entire Bible: they made a break between chapter 7 and 8. There should be no break. Why? Look 8:1, it begins with the word, “Therefore.” Now you never start a new thought with “therefore,” you always have to look to see what the “therefore” is there for! It always ties in with what has just been said. Now maybe you’ve heard Romans 8:1 before, but you’ve never tied it in with Romans 7. Here’s the problem. Some of you are struggling with sin in your lives—sometimes the things you want to do you don’t do—the things you don’t want to do, you do! Do you think God is sitting here today condemning you for that problem? Well just read Romans 8:1 now: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit (that’s the Holy Spirit of life) set me free from the law of sin and death.” You see, it is the Holy Spirit who is that other component that when the old nature says, “do wrong,” and your new nature says, “well I don’t want to do that,” it’s the Holy Spirit—when we surrender and yield to him—who comes in and takes control.

CONCLUSION

As a preacher of the Gospel, I always try to make things simple. I try to make it so simple that a child can understand. That’s hard to do sometimes, but here’s the way I understand it myself. I want to share a parable from my life with you. We have a cat named Ramona that lives in our home. As you know, no one owns a cat. You may own a dog, but you don’t own a cat, if you know what I mean. I have discovered that my job, because I live in the same house, is to be the automatic door opener for this cat. Ramona was run over by a 4-wheeler several years ago and her jaw was repaired, but because her bottom jaw was broken she can’t lap water up or milk up like a cat could normally. The only way she can get a drink is from the bathroom sink. She’ll jump up on the bathroom sink and stand there looking at me as if to say, “Turn the water on, dummy!” And I turn a little water on. She lets water fall on her paw and then drinks it when it bounces up into her mouth. And so, she’s always jumping up on the sink and I’m going over and turning on the water, waiting until she’s finished, and then turning it off. In my study in the mornings, as I’m trying to study and get into the word of God, I’ll look over to the door and there’s Ramona standing there, just looking at me, and then she looks at the door, and I know she’s saying, “Dummy, get up and open the door, I want to go outside!” Then you put her outside, and after awhile you walk by and she’s sitting there outside the door looking in with these big eyes saying, “Let me in!” I’m here to confess to you that sometimes that cat controls me! But sometimes I’m proud of the fact that sometimes I take control and I control that cat! I don’t like the cat in our bedroom when we’re asleep at night, and so before I get ready to go to bed I pick her up whether or not she wants to go out, and take her out! Sometimes maybe I want

her to be outside, whether she wants to be outside or not, and so I just pick her up and put her outside. Sometimes I control the cat and sometimes the cat controls me—we’re at war against each other. You may ask, “Why don’t you just kill that cat!” Well, if I did, my wife would just get another one the next week!

But I’ve discovered something. When I get in my car and leave the house, when I vacate the premises, I don’t even think about Ramona the cat. When I leave the premises, she has absolutely no control over me and there is no conflict between us. Are you wondering where I’m going with this story? Well, in me there is a sinful nature and my good nature and this sinful nature fight against each other but it’s only when I (the big I) vacate the premises and I am crucified with Christ that the Holy Spirit moves in and He takes over. You see the only way you can have victory over sin in your own personality is when you vacate the premises! When you say, like the apostle Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “I (the big I) am crucified with Christ! I’m out of here! Nevertheless I (the little “I”) live. But not I (big “I”) but it is Christ who lives in me. It’s your/my choice. Which nature are we going to listen to?”

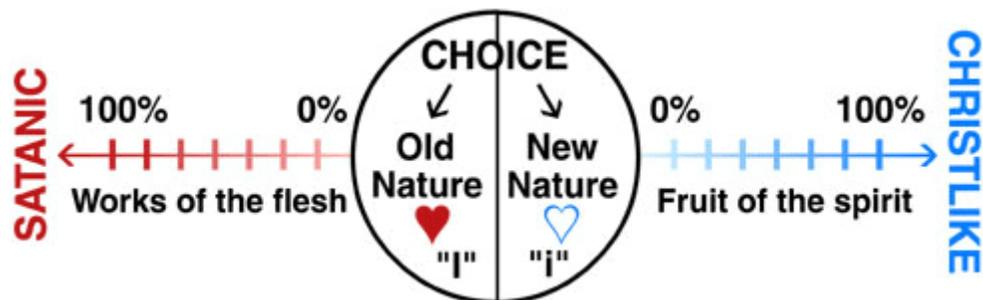
OUTLINE

Salvation in three tenses

Past	Justification	Penalty of sin
Present	Sanctification	Power of sin
Future	Glorification	Presence of sin

A maturing Christian:

I. STRUGGLES WITH SIN



1. Old Nature (I) - Carnal Christian
2. New Nature (i) - Spirit-filled Christian

II. SEEKS TO OBEY GOD

Can you say,

1. I desire to obey God?
2. I delight when I obey God?
3. I determine to strengthen my new nature?

III. SURRENDER TO GOD'S SPIRIT

1. The agony - Who will rescue me?
2. The answer - Jesus has done it!
The Spirit will do it!



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes