

THE SET OF YOUR MIND

By: Brian Coatney

Being a left-brain person, I've always loved little models and diagrams and things like that; and so, if you'll just bear with me, I'll try and walk through the thinking that caused me to develop this little scenario. I want to start by identifying the participants in the game. They are the only three that matter to you or me initially. On one side of the ring, wearing the black robe, at 550 pounds, we have Satan. And there is his nature, which I'll go into later. And on the other side of the ring we have the Lamb, the one we know and love, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his character. And then we see ourselves in there, because eventually we must deal with the question, "What about me?" That sounds like a selfish question; but it's a question we have to answer.

This is why Paul in Romans 7 is saying, "What about me?" When he came to know who he was in Christ, then in Romans 8 and on through the rest of his epistle (and this is always the pattern) his life took on a focus of being for others. I've heard it said before, and it's true, that if I know who I am, then I know who you are. And I have also found it true that whenever I am doubting who I am in Christ, I start to sink inside myself. The weight of the oppression is like that of an anvil or a millstone. It's as if my eyes start to recede in their sockets, not physically, but life starts to go out of them. All of a sudden things seem hopeless, and the temptation is to give in to that. But once I'm affirming back who I am, then there's the possibility of loving you. That's why Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Now we live in a generation that, in a secular sense, is the "Who am I?" generation. I like to visit the Walden Bookstores, which are in most malls. You go in and there's every pop book under the sun about how to stroke yourself. And we've thought that's selfish. And, from where they're coming, it is. But they're asking the right question. They're just not coming from the right foundation. So, who am I? I've seen it criticized in modern

theological journals that this is the “me” generation. Well, it is the “me” generation. To question who I am is not wrong. It’s coming to the right conclusion about who we are that’s important.

SPIRIT MINDSET

Now I want to say a thing or two about Romans 8:6, because Paul makes an important contrast here. He says that the mind set on the spirit is life and peace, and the mind set on the flesh is death. Picture in your mind the “us” in the scenario, represented by members or flesh--soul and body. That’s where everything touches us and where we begin to learn everything. If our minds are always on how we think and how we feel, then the battle is lost. It’s not that it’s unimportant how we think or how we feel; it’s just that the only way to really come to enjoy and know ourselves freely in our souls and in our bodies is to have our minds set on the Spirit. So we have to go about this in an indirect way. A mind set on the Spirit frees us then through our feelings, emotions, and thoughts, to be what we are meant to be.

Looking at the scenario again we see that there are two natures competing to express themselves through our members lives in us and is our life, if we’re Christians; and the other one is now on the outside of us, and is the usurper, the deceiver. When we were not born-again, this was reversed. It was then the usurper, the deceiver, who lives in us, and had ownership over us. As Paul says in Eph. 2:2, we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. we were all children of disobedience and controlled by the spirit of error.

It’s a strong thing to recognize that before we were Christians, no matter how good we felt-- and here’s how deceiving feelings can be for a non-Christian - or how good life seemed to be, or how moral or upright or proper, that our life was actually

controlled by Satan. He expressed his lusts by us, whether it was in a highly cultured and refined way or in a base, sensual, out and out reprobate way. In those days Jesus Christ was the one who was on the outside trying to tempt us toward Him, to woo us to want to exchange Satan for Him as inner Lord. But now I want to talk about the Christian, the person who has been born again and knows Jesus Christ as his life.

GOD BECAME A MAN

We are a people who live in the flesh, and I don't mean flesh in a bad sense. We live in the flesh and experience life through our members. The scripture says that no man has seen God at any time, but that the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him (John 1:18). So no one has ever really seen God, and no one really is ever going to see God. All we ever see of God is an expression of Him through somebody's members. Even in the Old Testament, Moses didn't see God. He experienced a blinding flash - the backside of God passing by. But the disclosure of God was through something written on tablets of stone, from which men were to see through to the character and nature of God.

The New Testament revelation of God's nature to us, which is the highest that anyone has seen and testified of, was God who became a man. What separates us from all other religions and theologies is that God became a man in Jesus Christ. He took on limitation and came to the earth in a particular form. And that was the difficult thing for people. "How can this be God?" Men could see him, touch him, feel him, hear him, and write down what he said. They could poke him and say, "Are you for real?" That was the thing that people threw off. How could a man be God? Thus we see the purpose of God really starting to become clear through the historical life of Jesus Christ. Here was an

example of God living out life as a man in a total form. And his purpose since then has been to reproduce more of those forms.

Jesus Christ's life would have been a waste if he had just come to earth and said something like, "O.K. now, I'm showing you what God life lived out in a human body through members, through flesh, through soul and body. But you can never experience or know it for yourself." That would have been terrible. The best that you would have been able to do would have been to say, "Well, the meaning of life, then, is that we all get in as close to Jesus Christ, in the body form, as we can." so, the disciples would have been the lucky ones, and the people that didn't live anywhere close to Palestine would have been the unluckiest ones of all. The whole goal of life would have been to get as close to the physical Jesus Christ as you could. and, obviously, where would that leave us today?

REPRODUCTION OF CHRIST

But His message to them, which He began to reveal more at the end of His life, was, "That's not what I'm about. You don't realize it, but I am going away (and that was terrifying to them), and will come to you again. And when I come to you again, you will know me like you have never known me before, because everything that I am will be inside of you. You will be inside of me and I in you and you will be as I am. I reproducing myself." That's why they began to call the believer Christians at Antioch: it means "little Christ." We have given lip service to it. But that's the whole point of the message. Just as it was hard to look at Jesus and believe that God could be a man: that man, it's frightening to us initially to look at ourselves and believe God could be a man: THIS man, you or I.

Are we equating our human created selfhood with the eternal Godhead? Sometimes people are afraid we are saying, "I am God," and I know that was the thing that staggered me when I

first heard this message. I wondered, "What are we coming to when somebody who's a Christian is saying something like that?" But the point is that spirit entities, either God or Satan, are trying to reproduce their entire life quality through human members. Now it took me a long time to begin to discern that these are the only two natures in the universe and that neither one of them derives from you or me in a created sense. Therefore, you don't have a human nature of your own; your nature is the one you are married to in spirit.

A Christian's nature then, is Christ, though he can be tempted by Satan and fall into sin. A non-Christian's nature is Satan, though Christ can woo him and perform some works of grace through him. But in neither case does the person have a human nature of his own.

THE SET OF YOUR MIND

(Part 2)

NOT IMITATION, BUT SPIRIT MANIFESTATION

I have listed four characteristics on each side of our illustration: four to describe the nature of Satan, and four revealing the life of our Lord. Note that we humans, created by God to be containers and expresses of a deity presence, have no nature of our own. What we do reveal is our indweller: Christians are vessels of Christ and, in like manner, non-Christians are vessels of Satan.

Satan's nature is well describes by the characteristics of pride, covetousness, envy and wrath. These are not presented in the sequence anywhere that I know of in the New Testament. In fact, I came across them in the writings of two men.

The first writer, Jacob Boehme, was a German cobbler who lived in the late 1500's and early 1600's. He is very hard to read,

because he almost invented his own language; but he was clear enough about pride, covetousness, envy, and wrath. The other writer, an Englishman named William Law, was an expositor of Boehme but wrote in a more direct and readable style. I began reading his work, particularly **The Spirit of Love and The Spirit of Prayer**. And he, too, wrote about pride, covetousness, envy, and wrath.

For these things to be picked as representing sin seemed arbitrary at first to me. I had always thought it to be much more empirical to define sin as behavior -- something you do, an act, or deed. But when you think about it, everything sinful does come from these qualities.

SATAN'S WILL WAS "I Will"

Pride is the root characteristic of all sin. We know from the fall of Satan that his sin was "I will, -- "I will" or "I will"-- as opposed to God's will. Every form of pride is the exultation of self at the expense of someone or something else. That's why we always sense when we're feeling condescension in another person. More and more, I know when people are condescending to me; and I know through the spirit when the temptation comes to condescend to them.

This is a problem with a lot of teaching that goes on and with the ones who are teaching. It's a way of holding other people in a place of following, and it's a way of keeping self exalted. Many people do it sincerely, but they're sincerely wrong. Really, there is a condescension. I began to get glimpses of workings of pride in C.S. Lewis's little book, *The Screwtape Letters*. It's a humorous book, but also devastatingly serious and diabolical underneath. You see where Satan's goal always is to consume and eat other people, to get them to follow him, and to build himself up at their expense.

Pride also manifests itself through covetousness, which basically is wanting something for self. The whole world then is for you. Norman Grubb's story about how he was converted is interesting, because he began to realize that he was lost when he saw how selfish he was. His whole outlook was: "everything for me."

Covetousness, in turn, leads to envy. When a person can't get what he wants for himself, but others seem to, he despises that prospering. For him, anything other people get for themselves is something he can't have for himself. That is how envy works.

What is wrath and where does come from? Wrath is a turmoil; it's like a raging wheel inside that churns and turns and burns. That's what Hell is made of, and that's why Jesus, when he described Hell, said that there is weeping and gnashing of teeth -- the "worm dieth not," and the jackals howl. It's a weeping, howling, gnashing place because of pride, covetousness, envy, and wrath. Jesus used the most fearful physical description to make the point and warn people in love.

So we may say that pride - the exaltation of self - foments the desires of something for the self (covetousness), which leads to an envy of others who seems to be prospering, ending finally in wrathful turmoil. This sequence of characteristics is compatible with and comes out of the "I will" and "I will for myself" type of mentality. It is the expression of the nature of Satan himself.

In contrast, consider the opposite nature - that of the Lamb of God: submissive, self-giving, joyful in other's good, and full of peace.

JESUS CHRIST SAID, "TAKE ME"

The opposite of pride really is emptying and submission. I know that submission is a "dirty" word, but you will like it better the way I'm going to describe it from Philippians 2. Jesus Christ was equal with God before the foundation of the world, and He emptied Himself to become a servant. He went from being a "have-all" to saying "I'll be a have-not for you." He couldn't submit Himself to you or to me anymore than He's done. What could be greater submission than the Lamb of God being willing to be slain for us?

God's whole nature is one of submission. He has said, "I give myself for you; I put Myself entirely at your disposal. Take Me. I'm bread; eat Me. Drink My blood. come unto Me and take." That's His nature. He is the Ultimate One who is submitting.

God only ask us to submit because that's His nature. So when His Word comes to me to submit to other, He's not asking me to kowtow and put myself under somebody else. He's just saying, "Empty yourself for everything and everyone around you, and in that way you will find life."

The opposite of covetousness actually is giving. Instead of taking a thing for myself, my whole disposition now is toward what I can give; and that's a joy in and of itself. I used to think it was trite when people said, "Giving is its own reward." And I thought, "That sounds good, but giving is not its own reward. You give, you chafe a bit, and you find a string in there." I've learned through the years to recognize true giving versus covetousness. You can tell if that string is there.

But the beautiful thing about god is that there are never any strings. He says, "There it is; it's yours. If you take it, all will be well with you. If you don't take it, all won't be well; but I'm not standing with a ruler like the old school teacher. I'm not going to rap on your wrists and say that you own Me back."

Envy is hating it when others have something we want; but by contrast, we find that people who have really come to know Christ as their life evidence a genuine joy in the good that

happens to others. Oh, that was hard for me. I see it exemplified most in my mother-in-law, who is a lovely woman. She always delighted about any wonderful thing that happens to others. I looked at people and thought of the reason why they didn't deserve what they got and ways they were always falling short.

The Scripture says, "To him who has, more shall be given. To him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." My mother-in-law loves the good life herself, and she loves it for others, too. And I had not and hated it that others had; I wanted to take it away. That was envy, and that was wrong.

Finally, the peace of Jesus Christ's nature is a contrast to the wrath of Satan's nature. And as wrath is the end result of pride, covetousness, and envy, and culminates in Hell; so peace is the crown of submission, self-giving, and joy in others' good, and finds its ultimate completion in the presence of God. Meanwhile in this life, we find that those whose minds are set on the Spirit experience life and peace. All the deeds of righteousness flow out of that.

PAUL SAID, "I DON'T UNDERSTAND MYSELF"

When I became a Christian, I thought I was a combination of an old and a new nature. I didn't yet know that I have no nature of my own. Therefore, when I experienced joy, then I thought it was my joy; or when I experienced joy, then I thought it was my joy; or when I experienced envy, I thought it was my envy. Now it was mine in the sense that I certainly experienced it, because I bought into it and believed into it.

Later I came to experience that same frustration which Paul saw operating inside of himself. Paul thought, "There are things that I want to do, and I'm not doing them; there are evil things that I do not want to do, and those are things that I am doing."

He hated living with this dilemma. At a certain point he said, "I don't understand myself - I'm confused."

It fascinated me, as I read the old mystic writers, to realize that their list of pride, covetousness, envy, and wrath contained a problem area familiar to the Apostle Paul. In Rom. 7, Paul exclaims how he came to know about sin. It was through the law, which confronted him with: "You shall not covet." In other words, "You shall not want something in a self-for-self way."

WE INSIST, "IT'S A LAW"

The whole "game" begins there - with the law - and has been "played" there all along. What is the law, really, when you get right down to it? Imagine that I have an apple in my hand. I drop it and ask you, "What did you just see?" You might say that you saw the law of gravity. If I wanted to tease you a little bit, I'd say, "No, you just saw an apple drop." What happened is that we observed the way things are in nature.

Or Isaac Newton came along and saw that when two "bb's" hit together, they bang back apart: "For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction." We say, "That's Newton's first law." We act as if the thing happens because of the law, apart from the thing itself. And really, all we've done is to describe the way it is.

Actually, we could say there are no such things as the laws of nature. There's only nature. There are no laws in the universe. There is only the way things are. There is the way Satan is, and there is the way Jesus Christ is. And the Bible is a description, in some particular forms, of how that works out. We come along and say, "It's a law," separating things from their true nature. This is what Paul discovered in Romans 7. He had thought that good and evil were products of his own independent doing. That, however, is sin's deception through the law.

The whole business of finding out who WE ARE involves the discovery that we live life, not a something to be imitated, but as

WHO HE IS. I heard people say for years, "Only Christ can live the Christian life." It sailed right by me. But if only Christ can live the Christian life, then only Christ can live the Christian life. There is no independent human self, which lives it.

THE SET OF YOUR MIND

(Part 3)

DOORWAYS TO SPIRIT LIVING

(The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, according to Romans 8:6. Yet, these qualities are not "our life or "our peace, since there is no independent function of the self. God designed the human self as a vessel to express His life. Our learning how that works is the subject of Romans 7 & 8 and of this final part on the "The Set Of Your Mind,")

WE'VE ALL BEEN TRICKED

There are laws in Scripture, and they are there to catch you as long as you can be caught. I've been tricked. You've been tricked. We've all been tricked. There is no sense pouting about it and saying, "How did that happen to me?"

Notice the way in which the trick works in our thinking? "How did that happen to ME? How could I be the kind of person who would have done that?" And we say, "How could you be the kind of person who would do that?" If we really believe the saying, "But for the grace of God, there go I," why do we say,

“How could you have done that?” How could you have **not** done that?

That’s something I learned from my mother-in-law. I would explain that I had done thus and so, and she would reply, “YOU couldn’t have done anything differently.” I would insist that I should have and could have done differently. But she sensed the spirit of what I was saying and heard the sense of independence in the “I” with which I spoke.

One day when I first got married, my mother-in-law looked at me and said, “You’re just shot full of pride.” But then that was a lie I believed in too: that “I” was full of pride. I felt that the pride was “ME” and that I was doomed to always be a proud person. Are you doomed to always be a proud person? If you have a nature of your own and if you have a proud nature, then you are doomed to be a proud person. But if there are only two natures in the universe and you are going to express one of those natures, then you are no doomed to be a proud person. You are destined to be a son of God and to express the life of Christ.

But the law comes along and says we should be a certain way. And don’t we hear that thought in the back of our minds all the time? I do. Everyday the thought come pouring through: “You know you really should be like this, and you really should have said it that way, and you really should have smiled better at that person. You really should have done this, and you really should have done that.” sometimes when I open the Bible, it seems to be saying the same things, raking me over the coals until I get sick and miserable. Then I ask, “Why am I falling into that again?” It produces a sense of wretchedness; and it’s meant to, and it’s good that it does.

PAUL’S EXPERIENCE

Paul began to experience God's tricks when the Lord reminded him, "You shall not covet." God knew what would happen. Romans 5:20 explains that the law came that the transgression might abound. But Paul says in the early part of Romans 7, "That which I thought would result in life resulted in death. I was alive apart from the law, or so I felt." He thought he was alive, but he was going along spontaneously in error.

The law came and revealed the covetousness operating in Paul's heart. Then he fought with it, aggravated it, and stirred it up even more. It tripped him up right and left. Every time he said to himself, "You shouldn't have done that," and he'd try not to do it, bang, down he'd go. Or if he scolded himself with, "You should have done that," and tried to do it, bang, down he would go again. It became a turmoil. And that, "I want to do good; I can't do it. I don't want to do evil; I do it." He felt all the worse for being a Christian. His question was, "How do I get out of this?"

Now some people might say, "Well, there's a little good and a little bad in the best of us, and there's a little good and a little bad in the worst of us. Nobody's perfect." But my goal was to be perfect. I couldn't bear the thought of anything less. I knew that there was such a thing as perfection and there had to be some way to find it. There had to be a solution. So I kept on, and kept on, and kept on looking for it until I found out who and what and where perfection was. I found perfection, Christ living His perfect life in me by faith, but not in the way I thought I would.

FINDING THE SOLUTION

The apostle Paul also did not find perfection in the way he thought he would. His first breakthrough came when he said, "If I'm not doing the good that I would, and if I'm doing the evil which I would not, I see that it's no longer I doing it, but sin in

my members" (Rom. 7:17). He saw where his heart really was, and that even to will what was good and hate what was evil took the heart of God in him. The first thing he had to get straight was that the covetousness he saw operating in his members was not really him.

I got a piece of this revelation myself a number of years ago when I heard someone quote that verse. I got hold of the first part of the verse: "It's no longer I." So I would do things I hated, but at least I had the consolation of not despising myself as having a wicked heart. But I was frustrated because I didn't want sin to operate in my members.

A friend used to quote that verse to me from Jeremiah, "That heart is deceitful...and desperately wicked: who can know it?" I would counter, "No, that is not the real me." Then that person would retaliate, "What IS this REAL YOU?" You see, people become accustomed to responding to what is happening in the three-dimensional world according to how they think and feel. All I knew was the real me was righteous, but that still didn't change the fact that the deceiver was operating his stuff through my members.

It was great to see that Paul's experience was similar to mine. He states the problem once in Romans 7:17, "It's no longer I but sin swelling in me." Then he goes over the same cycle again in verses 19 and 20: "I don't do the good I would; I do the evil I would not. Therefore I see it's no longer I, but sin swelling in me." He's like a record that's stuck or a camera not quite in focus. He knows a piece of the truth, but can't get knows a piece of the truth, but can't get sin to quit operating in his members.

LEARN WHAT YOU CAN'T DO

The answer is knowing what is and is not the real you and the truth about independent self-effort. Paul couldn't get his heart's desire operating through his members because he didn't see that he was trying to do it himself. Frustration actually increased as he started to believe his heart was right, but sin still operated in him. That's what drove Paul to those last two verses in Romans 7 which begin, "Wretched man that I am!" I used to think it was terrible to be in a place like that; but it is wonderful, because you've got to go down before you go up. You have to learn what you can't do.

I've always hated it when people commented on my wretchedness. Many believers understandingly sympathize, "Oh, yes, we're all in the same boat, and we live in these bodies and have this old nature; but when Jesus comes back..." But I had one friend who, when I described my inner suffering, would rejoicingly say, "Oh, Brian, this is so good for you!" I loved her and knew it was the truth, but I can't tell you the things I wanted to say to her. But I would let her encouragement sink in, and submit myself to God's truth. The temptation would have been to think, "Why am I the kind of person who would...?" Then I started to run into more people who would respond to my expressions of despair with, "Oh, wonderful." Well, what was so wonderful about it? It didn't feel wonderful.

The very next thing that Paul says in Romans 7:24 after, "Wretched man that I am," is the beautiful question, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" We see people all over the world with all kinds of problems. Alcoholics come to mind. I've heard it explained repeatedly that until they realize they have a problem and ask for help, they can't be helped. The Lord says that until we realize what we cannot do, he's not going to deliver us. If He is All and in all, then why should He complete with our deceived independent efforts?

Jesus Christ said, "Of myself I do nothing." If He is my model, and I say of myself, "I do nothing," why then should God anesthetize me from the pain of self-effort when I try to do something? That is why love sometimes looks cruel, when it says

“Go to it. You want to give it your best shot? Then go ahead. And when you are so wretched that you just can’t bear another second of it and you finally say, “Who will deliver me from the body of this death,” then the answer will come.” Paul put it this way: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!”

Now Paul says an interesting thing here: “So then, on the one hand, with my mind I serve the law of God; but with my flesh the law of sin.” That looks like he is saying that his flesh has a sin nature. It appears as though he is giving up at that point and saying, “Well, I’ll worship God with my mind, but with my flesh I’m just going to live in sin.” He’s not saying that! Otherwise he wouldn’t have written Romans 8. What he is saying is, “Thank God, I finally see how it works. Thank God, I finally see.”

Let me illustrate. If I had a hammer and dropped it on my foot, and my foot hurt, and I didn’t realize why it hurt, and I dropped the hammer on it again and again, I’d just hate the fact that my foot hurt. But I would finally come to see that my foot hurt. But I would finally come to see that my foot was hurting because I kept dropping this hammer on it, not because my foot was bad. I would say, “Thank God, I see that when I drop this hammer on my foot, my foot hurts.” Likewise, Paul is saying, “I thank God I see that when I live out of self-effort, as if independent, I serve the law of sin. That kind of self-effort will always produce sin in the flesh. It’s meant to. It’s meant to produce wretchedness. Don’t ever feel sorry for anyone when they are going through that experience. You’ll do them no favor. Instead, help them to see their flesh in union with Christ and Spirit-operated by faith.

In Romans 8, Paul continues, “The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death.” He sees a higher law. He thinks, “I see now how this sin-and-death law has been operating, and it’s meant to operate that way on that level. But I’m going to put the higher law into operation and live out of that; and that’s going to produce a righteous life.

DON'T CONDEMN YOURSELF ANYMORE

Unfortunately, there's an artificial chapter division between Romans 7 and 8. The Bible wasn't written that way. The break in thought is awkward because it leaves you hanging with the notion, "Well, this is the way it is, you know. We're going to love God with our hearts, but we're going to always go out and be messing up." But almost without a breath, Paul immediately continues in Romans 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation." And the reason there is no condemnation is that once you realize you cannot live life apart from the Spirit, you don't condemn yourself anymore as if you could have.

Why have we taken so much guilt and accusation into ourselves? It is because Satan comes in and just rips and tears and sifts. He says, "Oh, see what you did?" or "You shouldn't have done that." So we take in all this condemnation and think we are to blame. Granted, the wrong thing happened in our members and came out of our unbelief. In that sense we are responsible. But repentance doesn't come from those horrible feelings of failure and self-flagellation.

Paul refers to godly repentance in II Cor. 7 as "not with regret as the world has." The world's lament is, "I'm sorry and I hate the fact that I did it. I loathe myself for doing it, because I really shouldn't be that kind of person; and I want to think more highly of myself." Judas Iscariot went out and hung himself. His response was the ultimate in self-aborrence, which comes pride: "I see what I did and hate MYSELF for doing it." If they can't find fulfillment as a person, they try to destroy the person who needs the fulfillment.

Peter learned his lesson in a bitter way. In Luke 22:31 it is recorded that Jesus said to him, "Peter, Peter, Satan has desired to sift you. But I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail." Jesus knew what was in his heart and that Peter needed to be

sifted by the devil. And God knows that we do, too. We need to learn to recognize this process for what it is.

But Peter still didn't have the point in his conversation with Jesus asked him three times, "Do you love (agape) me?" And each of the three times Peter's response was, "Yes, I love (phileo) you." What Peter had to do later on was to say in faith, "I am 'agape' love. I have learned now what I cannot do in and of myself and that soul love can carry me only so far. It's not invalid, it's precious, and it's a wonderful part of my humanity; but it can only go so far" (II Peter 1:3-8).

Jesus knew where Peter's "phileo" love was coming from, and what Peter would have to experience to learn the higher love. And the soul is also our doorway to the Spirit. We have to find out what the soul cannot do in order to get it back. The mistake would be to get disillusioned with the soul and begin to hate it somewhere in the process, as if it were really the problem. Your soul/body (flesh) is never the problem. Many people believe that the body is the problem. But Romans 8 is very clear: your body is not a liability anymore because you are in a spirit union with Jesus Christ and have the privilege of living by the Spirit.

The body is dead because of sin (a result of the Fall), Paul explains, but you have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in you. The Spirit that raised up Christ from the dead gives life to your mortal body; and by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body. If you don't live by the Spirit, your body will seem like a liability. then you will mistakenly hate it and everything else about your members.

YOU ARE A VESSEL

How do you quit hating your members? You realize that the arena of your members is not where the game is. The game involves this fellow, Satan, coming in through the law and telling

you that you should be something. He tries to get you to believe that you have a nature and that you can be either a getting person or a giving person. Then that's supposed to be you. The thing that we must get in focus is that it's "no longer I" in either of life's two possible union relationships. It's "no longer I" in either of life's two possible union relationships. It's "no longer I" in respect to the unbeliever's Satan-directed life (Eph. 2:2-3). Our message centers in saying that you are a vessel.

But we don't really believe we are vessels until we see ourselves as nothing. when I say that, I don't mean that as human beings we are non-entities or to be disposed in any way. No. We are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God, with the freedom of choice. The nothingness comes from knowing that we have nothing within ourselves to operate our members in expressing the life of God other than just simply the life of God Himself. Our one ultimate free choice is whether or not to believe that.

The trick is that Satan tries to produce in us the sense that we are independent selves. Then we think that we are the problem because we feel a certain way. We feel this pull, this hate, this resentment, or this lust. When you feel these through your members, you do have the temptation to think that's you, and not just a pull on your flesh. And if you think that you are your members in an absolute sense, you'll say, "Oh, that's me," and fruit of the flesh will be the result. If you don't buy into it, but say, "That's not me; CHRIST IS MY LIFE," then what you'll get is the fruit of the Spirit.

In *THE WAY TO CHRIST*, Jacob Boehme describes the Devil's work as pressing through and shifting the flesh and blood of our lives. He means that Satan is allowed to come into our members and rattle around and bang and create clamor and all kinds of evil pulls in our God-created thoughts, feelings, and desires. That's the sifting. We have often assumed guilt because we felt those pulls. We thought the pulls were really us - that they were our nature. We didn't recognize the lie of the enemy, so we didn't know how to say "No!" to it.

Therefore, Boehme continues, "the soul often stands in anguish when Hell thus presses in it and wishes to reveal itself in it." Most Christians would feel something was terribly wrong if they ever experienced deep anguish over things they thought or felt. But Jesus said to Peter, "Yours is the kingdom, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It's not as if the gates of hell were way over there and you're way over here, with Satan hollering over every now and then and saying, "Hey, I'd like to tempt you a little." No. The Devil gets right up close, inside your members and starts jerking and pulling and tearing and hollering at you.

YOU CAN DO ALL THINGS

If you think it's you, down you will go. If you recognize it for what it is and say, "That's the Devil pulling on my members and not me, for my life is Jesus Christ," you'll walk through it. And if you're not quite sure, and you're just barely holding on, the anguish will continue. It is meant to, because the anguish is what presses you to the point. And the point is: what breaks the gates of hell is not something you do for God or God does for you. **WHAT BREAKS THE GATES OF HELL IS THE PERSON HE IS IN YOU!**

Finally, we stop lamenting what we cannot do and triumphantly say, "When I am weak, then I am strong," and "I can do all things through Christ Jesus." God has used our Romans 7 failings to expose the lie of independent self only to bring us to see that His grace is sufficient **IN US**. Therefore, our ongoing lives are as "more than conquerors" in those very things we formerly thought we could not do. Now we walk in the spirit of, "As He is, so are we in this world."