

How Many Me's are There?

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Answering what the Scriptures say about the believer's true nature is complicated by three factors.

First, several Greek words can be translated "nature." The New American Standard Bible, for instance, uses the word "nature" in Ephesians 2:3, Hebrews 1:3, and James 5:17, even though a different Greek word is employed in each of these verses, each with a somewhat different nuance of meaning.

Second, the English word "nature" itself has multiple meanings. For instance, "nature" can be used to indicate the identity or essential make-up of something ("man is by nature a living creature"), or it can simply mean the characteristics of something ("Fred is by nature ill tempered"). Describing someone's characteristics is a more superficial use of the term "nature" than describing their basic identity. Both, however, are acceptable uses of the English word "nature."

Third, various English translations of the Bible use the word "nature" when a Greek word for "nature" is not used at all. The NIV for example, translates Paul's Greek word "sarx" as "sinful nature," when in fact, "sarx" does not mean either "sinful" or "nature." Directly translated, it simply means "flesh." The NIV translators, thinking Paul's use of the word "flesh" would not have meaning for the modern reader, inaccurately substituted the words "sinful nature" instead.

Given all the difficulties surrounding the word "nature," I find that the question of the believer's nature is best answered by avoiding the word "nature" and its variety of meaning altogether. Rather, I ask, "What does the New Testament teach about the true identity of the believer? What, at the very core, is the essence of the believer?" On those questions, the Scriptures are very clear.

First, we see that Paul says in Romans 6:6 that our "old man" was crucified with Christ. That is, our old, unregenerate, Adamic spirit was put to death on the cross of Christ. He no longer exists. In his place, God has created a "new man," a new spirit made in the likeness of God's righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). The old man we inherited from Adam is dead; the new man that we now are, we inherited from Christ. One was sinful, it is now dead. The other is righteous (II Cor. 5:21), it is now alive. Our true identity is that of righteous saints, not sinners.

Second, that we can only have one basic identity is evident from Scripture. If we had two basic identities, an old one and a new one, we would be both a child of God (I John 3:1) and a child of Satan (John 8:44). We would be both "in Christ" and "in Adam" (I Cor 15:22). We would be both righteous and sinful. But the Scriptures are clear that no one can have these opposing identities simultaneously. We cannot be a child of God and Satan at the same time. We can only be one, or the other. We cannot be both "in Christ" and "in Adam." We were physically born "in Adam." At our new birth we were transferred (rescued) from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ." Likewise, we cannot be both sinful and righteous. Our body and soul can, at various times, act righteously or act sinful. But our spirit, the deepest essence of who we are, cannot be both righteous and sinful. It is either made in the likeness of Adam (sinful), or in the likeness of Christ (righteous). It cannot be both.

Third, the Scriptures teach that a believer's spirit exists in union with the Lord's Spirit. Paul tells the Corinthians, "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (I Cor. 6:17). God has permanently united Himself to our spirit. The question is, would God have done so if our spirit, the essence of our being, was sinful? Paul answers that question himself: "...for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ

with Belial ..? (II Cor. 6:14-15a). If our spirit was sinful, God would not join Himself to it. But God has joined Himself to it, because He has recreated our spirit in the likeness of His righteousness.

Finally, the Scriptures describe the believer's warfare from the perspective of the believer's single identity, not a split identity. That is, the Bible never describes the believer's warfare as the old man versus the new man, or the old Adamic spirit versus, the new Christ-like spirit. Teachers frequently portray the life of the believer in this manner, as if both the old man and the new man are at war within us. But as Paul says, the old man, the Adamic spirit, is gone. He was crucified on the cross with Christ.

He cannot continue to wage war within the believer, for he no longer exists. Only the new man, the believer's new spirit, exists.

As Paul explains in Romans 7 and 8 and Galatians 5, the battle is not between the old man and the new man, but between the flesh and the Holy Spirit. The believer does, indeed, engage in warfare. But the enemy is not some part of the believer's essential being. Rather, it is the the believer's flesh and the law (or power) of sin in his members that the believer is to reign over.

And as Paul makes clear, neither the flesh nor the law (or power) of sin in a believer is who the believer truly is (Romans 7: 17-23).

Yes, the believer must deal with them. But they do not constitute the believer's identity. Thus, our warfare is not us against ourselves. It is us and the Holy Spirit who are aligned against the law (or power) of sin that inhabits our earthly bodies.

To summarize: the Scriptures simply do not teach that the believer has two conflicting identities. They teach the believer has one essential identity: a new creation in Christ, made in His likeness. That is why Paul consistently refers to believers as saints, not as sinners. Believers used to be sinners in Adam. Now they are saints in Christ, (And do you know what? sometimes they sin.)

LIFE WITH ONE ME IS MUCH BETTER!!

What practical difference does it make if believers understand their true identity, their essential being?
PLENTY!!!

First, when we understand who we truly are, a new creation in Christ, we will naturally want to live in accordance with our new identity.

Second, when we do sin, we will recognize that we are acting against our true identity.

Third, we will not find ourselves trying to war against ourselves (by crucifying our old man, etc.), as if we were the enemy.

Fourth, when we stand on the truth that we are a new man in Christ whose life is united with Christ's life, we can have assurance of victory over the law (or power) of sin. We will recognize that we do not have to act contrary to who we truly are.

And finally, we will be able to more completely understand and accept the love, grace, and power of God toward us—the God who has by His love, grace, and power performed the greatest possible miracle: remaking sinful humans into righteous saints. It is this God who is still able "to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20) and already has.