

I Am What I Am

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Slide 1

A young boy was being punished, and one of the punishments was that he was forbidden to go swimming. One day he came home with his hair wet, and his mother demanded an explanation.

“I fell in the lake,” he said. *“Really? Then why AREN’T your clothes wet?”* He grinned and said, *“Well... I had a feeling I was going to fall in. So, I took them off.”*

I’m pretty sure he did more than just fall in. In fact, I think he planned to fall in, and, since he was going to fall in anyway, he figured he may as well enjoy it.

Though his explanation was interesting: *“I had a feeling I was going to fall in.”* (Translation: I couldn’t help myself).

We live in a world where that type of rationale is used all the time: *“I can’t help myself. I just know I’m going to fall in and that’s just the way it is.”*

Today’s message in this series of “Lies People Believe,” is “I Am What I Am.” This lie promotes the idea that we are destined to be who we are.

This lie is just another way of saying, *“God created me this way, I can’t help myself.”* I AM WHAT I AM!!!

This phrase simply means that I have no choice. I can’t help being who I am, and since I can’t help doing what I do, I may as well accept it.

Rolling Stone magazine did an article on Marilyn Manson, a musician who was well known in the 1990s. They titled it: “*Marilyn Manson: The Monster Hiding in Plain Sight.*” In other words, he wasn’t a nice guy.

In an interview with *Beliefnet.com* he said, “*Initially I was drawn into the darker side of life. But it’s really just human nature. I started to learn that everything that’s considered a sin is what makes you a human being. All the seven deadly sins are man’s true nature. To be greedy. To be hateful. To have lust.*”

What he was saying was this: Sin is what makes you human so it’s unavoidable. I AM WHAT I AM!

This lie promotes the idea that we are destined to be who we are. You may feel trapped in whatever sin you may be engaged and believe you'll never change, but that's not true.

Slide 2

Now, we’ve seen a lot of this kind of thinking coming out of the LGBTQ+ crowd. In fact, for years a number of studies have tried to find a “*Gay Gene.*”

Researchers believed that homosexuals just can’t help themselves therefore there must be something in their DNA that makes them desire to be what they are. They’re trapped in their lifestyle.

The only problem with this is that researchers have yet to find any gene that forces a person to be gay.

According to new research published in the journal *Science*, genetics can't predict whether any person will engage in same-sex sexual behavior.

The study, which tested nearly half a million people, found that while there may be some genes that contribute to sexual behavior, they only play a tiny role, social and environmental factors make up the rest.

In essence, there's no Gay Gene that hardwires homosexuals to be gay. But that doesn't stop the LGBTQ+ crowd from continually protesting, *"I can't help myself."* *"I can't change who I am."* *"It's not my fault!"*

Yet, they're not alone. It seems that everybody who engages in behavior God calls sinful tends to say exactly the same thing.

A woman caught in adultery will say, *"I couldn't help myself. We just fell in love. We were destined to be together."*

The man discovered with child pornography on his computer will say, *"I couldn't help myself. That's just the way I'm wired,"* and the homosexual will say, *"I can't help myself, I was born that way."*

People who struggle with sin often repeat the same mantra over and over again: *"It's just who I am. I am what I am, and I can't change,"* or they'll say, *"I am what God made me, and I'll never be anything else."*

But God says that's not true. God anticipated people saying they were born "that way" centuries ago.

To people who engaged in sin and say, *"I was born that way,"* Jesus said, *"You must be born again."*

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth about this issue and said in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, *"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were."*

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

They had been sexually immoral, adulterers, homosexuals, greedy, drunkards, etc. but then they were born again.

2 Corinthians 5:17 puts it this way: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here.”*

Once you rise from the waters of baptism, you're born again. You're a new creation. You're changed by the power of God. Now, there's two sides to this coin of “I am what I am.”

One side of the coin are people who look at these individuals caught in sin and say, *“That's all you are and that's all you'll ever be. You were a sinner yesterday. You're a sinner today, and you'll be a sinner tomorrow. You're never going to change!”*

That's what ticked Jesus off so much about the Pharisees. To the Pharisees, sinners were always sinners. That's all they've ever been and that's all they'd ever be.

They'll never change because that's who they are. Because sinners were always going to be sinners, the Pharisees would never think of associating with such people.

But Jesus did. Jesus hung out with drunkards, prostitutes, and outcasts. By the time Jesus was finished with these people, they weren't drunkards, prostitutes, or outcasts anymore.

Matthew 9:10-13, *“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus came to transform people, to remake them. He came to change sinners into saints. This is why Christianity is based on the belief that everyone can be made new again. The blood of Jesus can take the worst sinner and make them pure.

Titus 3:3-5, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

Slide 3

I mentioned this belief of "I am who I am" was a two-sided coin. The other side of the coin is the belief, by those caught in sin, that "I can't help being what I am." Part of the reason this declaration appeals to so many people is it gives them an excuse.

At a church's monthly "Free Lunch," the people who set things up were surprised to find a man sleeping on the front yard as they drove up.

He was an old "hippie" kind of guy so they took pity on him and let him in so he could use the restroom.

When the pastor arrived and saw him sitting on the padded bench in the fellowship area he asked if he'd like to stay for the meal, but the man didn't seem interested.

A little later when the pastor when into the restroom, it smelled like 20 people had been smoking in there. He was pretty sure that there'd only been one smoker and he was sitting on that padded bench.

So, he went out to the man and gently asked if he'd been smoking in the restroom. His response, *"Yes, I did, but I didn't mean to."*

He didn't mean to? Did the cigarette just jump out of his pocket into his mouth and light itself?

Do you know what that man was saying? He was saying, *"Yes I smoked, but it wasn't my fault."*

People know what they're doing is wrong, but they don't want it to be their fault! *"I was born this way", "It's just the way I'm wired", "I can't help myself!"* If you know you're going to *"fall in the water,"* why beat yourself up about it?

Just be like that little boy we talked about at the beginning of this message. Make allowances for what you know you're going to do. That way you don't have to change. You can just live with it!

Now the problem is this: people who buy into this mindset often face hopelessness and despair.

The drunkard and the drug abuser are destined to always be addicted. The thief will always be a thief. The sexually immoral will always sleep around.

The prostitute and the homosexual will die as they lived. There's no hope... there's no future... there's no change!

Yet, if they're honest, they'll tell you that they're haunted by a kind of contempt and self-hatred that drags them down into despair, at least once in a while.

I'm reminded of the story of a woman who was arrested for prostitution. While she was being booked, she cried out, *"This isn't who I am!"*

Somewhere deep inside of her was a little girl saying, *"I don't like who I've become. I know I'm better than this."*

In her heart of hearts, she realized she was made in the image of God, but her life had gone terribly wrong, and she didn't like it!

She WANTED to change, but if she was always going to be a prostitute, why bother trying.

That's the deception of *"I am what I am,"* it buys into the idea that *"I'm trapped. I'm destined to be who I am and because of that, I'll never get out of this hole I'm in."*

Jordan Peterson told of a woman who was talking with a psychiatrist. She told the psychiatrist that she hoped her suffering was all her own fault.

Taken aback, the psychiatrist asks, *"Why?"* And she responded: *"If it's my fault then I can do something about it. But, if it's in my nature to be what I am, I'm doomed."*

She may not be able to change everything else, but she wanted to change herself. She felt trapped and afraid that she was destined to be what she was.

To that type of person God says: *"No, you're not trapped. If you want to change, I'll help you, but you have to want to change."*

That's why there's a repeated drumbeat of the cry "REPENT" in Scripture. Repent means, *"I want to change."*

John the Baptist's message was "Repent." Jesus' message was "Repent."

Peter's message was "Repent and be baptized," and Paul said, *"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."*

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The first step to being healed of your sin is to recognize that you've messed up and want to change – REPENT!!!!

If a person doesn't want to change, they're not going to. People will always find an excuse to do what they want to do.

They will always find a way to avoid doing what they don't want to do. Yet, if the sinner wants to change, God will help them.

Listen again to the words from Titus, *"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."*

You can't change yourself; God does that. God does that by washing you clean of your sins, by renewing you with the power of His Holy Spirit.

That's why the promise in Acts 2:38 is so powerful: *"...Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

When we repent, when we decide we want to change, and are baptized (allowing ourselves to belong to Christ), God's Spirit comes inside us to change us, to fix us, to renew us.

I've heard Christians tell me that they've struggled with smoking or drinking, and finally, they turned the problem over to God.

Then, either gradually or immediately, they lost their desire, or they got sick and couldn't do it anymore.

God did something that cut them off from their sin. How? Because God's Spirit dwells inside them to change them

Slide

Conclusion

The Christian is never trapped by their past. *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*

There's a story about an evangelist in England who lost his interest in spiritual things and drifted into a life of sin. Some of his sin was done in secret but ultimately, it became public knowledge and made headlines.

At first, all he could think of was that he had been ruined for life, but, finally, he realized what a fool he'd been, and came back to God like the prodigal son from the pigpen.

He found exactly the same thing the prodigal did. He discovered God's forgiveness and healing, and, after a few years, he even went back to preaching.

It seemed his scandal had been forgotten. But one night, when he was about to preach a revival, he was given a sealed letter.

It was unsigned but it described a shameful thing he had done. His stomach churned as he read it. The letter ended, *"If you have the gall to preach tonight, I'll stand and expose you."*

He took that letter and went to his knees and a few minutes later, he was in the pulpit. He began his message by reading the letter, from start to finish.

Then he said, *“I want to make it clear that this letter is perfectly true. I’m ashamed of what I’ve read, and what I’ve done. I come tonight, not as one who is perfect, but as one who is forgiven.”*

That night, people responded in great numbers and that letter became a magnet that drew crowds to hear him.

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”