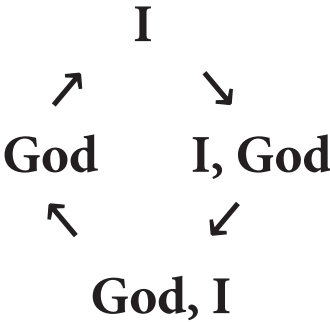


The I-Cycle

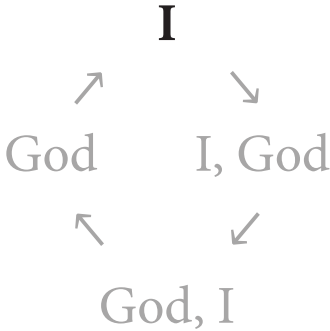


Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.



Our life with God follows a natural progression that we might refer to as *The I-Cycle*. This simple cycle will help illustrate the advancement through which God takes each of us in our recognition of Him in our lives.

THE "I" STAGE



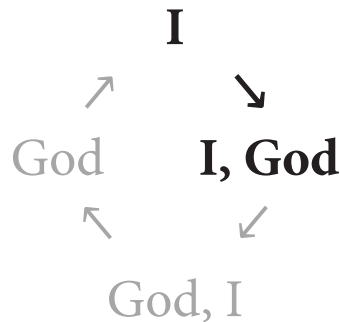
"I" is where we all start our lives. We come out of the womb naturally self-centered. It is all about "I." It seems as though all of the world revolves around us.

When we are hungry, we are fed; have indigestion, we are burped; are soiled, we are changed; are tired, we sleep. We are really unaware of anything that does not relate to our needs. We are oblivious that there is anything else even going on in the world.

As we begin to get older, we are questioned as to what we want to be when we grow up. As our development continues, we have the *sense* that we're on the throne of our lives.

This stage can and often does last for many years. We envision ourselves as the captains of our own ships, as the masters of our own fates. God scarcely enters our thoughts.

THE "I, GOD" STAGE



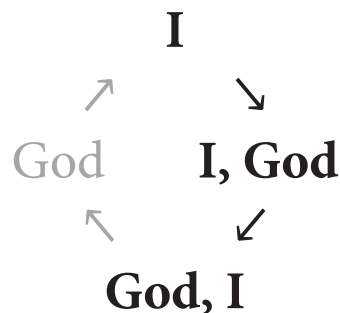
In the next stage we begin to recognize God in our lives. We might call this the "I, God" stage. We might even call this the beginning of our "religious" phase.

This is the "God is my co-pilot" period. We realize that we need some help through life and that God is standing by, available to assist us in our difficult times.

We view God as our advisor, but His presence and activity are contained. We think that we keep Him in a box, as it were. Perhaps the box in which we keep Him is a religious house of worship where we visit Him once a week, or on special occasions to give Him recognition and honor – and then go back to our regular daily lives without Him.

We may progress during this stage where, even on a daily basis, we take Him out of His box and offer Him some devotion for a select period of the day, and then resume our "I-life."

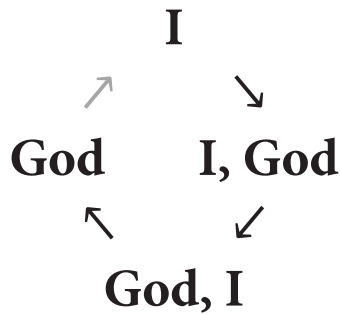
THE "GOD, I" STAGE



The next distinct change might be termed the “**God, I**” stage. This is where we begin to desire to “give” God *first place* in our lives. We now “surrender” to God, “allowing” Him passage into our lives.

In this part of the cycle we are much more conscious of His presence in our daily lives. Instead of being our “co-pilot,” we are now His. Where He was once our advisor, we seem to envision that we are His advisor. Though a true progression, this is more often than not the height of the “religious” stage.

THE “GOD” STAGE



This is that unique stage where we begin to truly recognize the sovereignty of “**God.**” We acknowledge that He is in control and rules all things, and that both good and evil come from Him.

Such Scriptures as these begin to capture our attention:

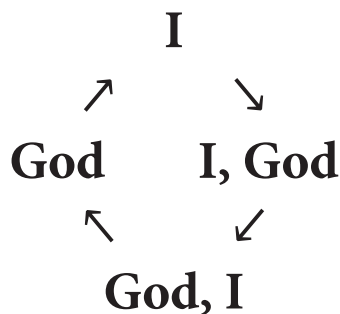
All is of God (I Corinthians 11:12).

All is of God (II Corinthians 5:18).

Out of Him and through Him and for Him is all (Romans 11:36).

The purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

THE “I” STAGE



The I-Cycle brings one full circle back to “I.” God’s sovereignty eventually leads us to the place where we actually realize that we are His handiwork, or His achievement (Ephesians 2:10). We are not self-created, self-made or self-determined.

Many stumble with personal pronouns. Such was not the case with Paul. We notice that he was not afraid to use the word “I.” This is because the mature believer recognizes that their life is Christ’s and, therefore, has no difficulty using personal pronouns.

By the grace of God I am what I am (I Corinthians 15:10).

Paul had no trouble making such statements, because he knew who he was. He knew that his old “I” was dead with Christ (Romans 6:8; Colossians 2:20), and his new “I” was Christ. He knew what he was – was by God’s grace. He did not give up who he was. In Christ, he had actually found his true self.

We, too, as we grow in our realization of God, grow in the realization that He is our life. We do not lose our identity of self; rather, we gain it.

Those who have not progressed in their development to this last stage of the cycle appear to have lost sight of themselves – the true “I” that God has made (and is making) of them.

Those not making it back to the “I” will appear to be afraid to speak of themselves using personal pronouns. Without this final stage in their development, their language becomes uncomfortable and detached regarding themselves. For example, you will not be able to thank them for anything – as they will awkwardly deflect anything personal back to God. “No, don’t thank me – it was all God.”

This may come as a surprise to some – but Paul uses “I” nearly 700 to upwards of 1200 times, depending on which translation one uses. He uses “me” nearly 200-300 times, again depending on which English version is used.¹

Paul’s use of personal pronouns flowed from his full understanding of God’s sovereignty in his life. It was the continued circumstance, the backdrop, and the context of his new “I” in Christ. As a result he could freely speak of himself.

Simply put, Paul recognized that his life was Christ’s.

To me to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21).

Listen to those amazing words: “*To me to live*” – is what? “*To me to live is Christ!*” Christ was Paul’s life! (Colossians 3:4).

Paul went so far in this view – that his life was Christ’s – that he even declared that he could save people.

1. Now of course, some of these many uses were quotations, references to God and others, and even used in a negative light of his old “I.” Nevertheless, many of the personal pronouns used by Paul were spoken of as a positive reference to himself.

If somehow I should be provoking those of my flesh to jealousy and should be saving some of them (Romans 11:14).

I became as weak to the weak, that I should be gaining the weak. To all have I become all, that I should undoubtedly be saving some (I Corinthians 9:22).²

Paul realized that everything he did was Christ's life. The same is true with us. Though our cycle began with the Adamic "I," that seemed as though it was independent of God and was the center of our own universe, now we have come full cycle to see the new "I" united with the life of God's Son.

The "I" of the old creation died with Christ, and now the "I" of the new creation thrives in the very life of God. There are not two "I"s. The pre-Calvary "I" is gone; only the post-Calvary "I" remains.

Paul was very much present in his life. He had **not** somehow been replaced by Christ Jesus – his supposed "Substitute." Instead, Christ had identified Himself with him in living union. The same is true of us.

I [a son of Adam] am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I [a son of God] live; yet not I [the "I" of the old creation], but Christ lives in me [the me of the new creation]: and the life [the life of God] which I [the unique person whom God has made me to be] now live in the flesh [right now, this very day] I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

"In Christ" we are free to be ourselves, the real person whom He has made us to be. We are free to use personal pronouns. We are free to speak of what we are doing. We are even free to say "You're welcome" when someone says "Thank you."

2. Paul even told Timothy that he could save himself and those who heard him.

Attend to yourself and to the teaching. Be persisting in them, for in doing this you will save yourself as well as those hearing you (I Timothy 4:16).

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