

WHO HE SAYS I AM

*A Study of Our
Identity in Christ*

JEAN GAFFIN

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CHRISTIAN
FOCUS

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JEAN YOUNG GAFFIN

In Memoriam

“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. . . .
let her works praise her in the gates.”

Thanks are due to Christian Focus Publications for its commitment and labors for making this book available.

Originating in presentations given over the years in group Bible studies and at conferences for women, it was the author’s hope to eventually make some of this material available in writing. Her family and others are thankful that this hope was realized and that she was able to complete and submit the manuscript shortly before the Lord, who does all things well, took her from this life suddenly and unexpectedly on 15 March 2019.

We cherish and honor the memory we have of her—wife, mother, grandmother, and friend to many—how by the grace of the Savior she loved and served her life reflected so winsomely the fruit of the Spirit flowing from her identity in Christ—that union she is now experiencing beyond our comprehension and what she had been granted to express so helpfully in this book.

It seems appropriate to note here that on her grave are these words:

STILL UNITED TO CHRIST WAITING
FOR THE RESURRECTION

(from answer 37 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism)

R. Gaffin, Jr
September 2019

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INTRODUCTION

What is your name? Who are you?

The world loves to label us. Our identity these days seems to be related to what group we are in. For example, in the United States, we can be African American, Euro American, Asian American or Hispanic American. We can be male or female or any of a number of supposed other gender choices out there. We can be LGBT or heterosexual. We can be a butcher or baker. We can be Mrs. Jones or Ms. Jones or Mx. Jones. We can be an environmentalist or a capitalist or a socialist. We can be a vegetarian or a carnivore.

So to find out our identity we have to pick from groups it would seem. Maybe we could identify as a vegetarian, socialist, bisexual, Euro American for example.

Most of us settle on being ordinary women with ordinary experiences and ordinary families and aren't too hung up on identifying ourselves by some group. That is, if we have any sense, we let our various group identities take a back seat to knowing who we really are as individuals.

I say this because most of you reading this book can claim the most important identity. You are a Christian.

You are a believer in Jesus Christ. That puts Christian in front of every one of your identities. You are a Christian wife, a Christian mom, a Christian lawyer, a Christian bricklayer, and so on. Being a Christian means all of you. You are not a mom who happens to be a Christian along with your other descriptions.

But, as a Christian, do you think of yourself as a sinner struggling every day to be more like Jesus and finding it an uphill battle? Well, you and I are sinners, of course. We are so grateful that Jesus has made all the difference for us by dying on the cross to save us from our sins. Yes, it is often a severe struggle. I'd like to suggest, however, that the Bible says our basic identity is that we are *saved* sinners. Because of that our true identity, who we truly are, is found 'in Christ.' We are united to Christ by faith.

As we read the ESV version of the New Testament we see the phrase 'in Christ' 89 times according to online search software, Bible Works. In Christ everything has changed. We have new identities. We are released from the pursuit of self-image which sees self 'as the central project of our lives. It produces a blessed release by inducing a new self-forgetfulness in us precisely because we now know who we really are.'¹

I hope this book will encourage women as they read the terms I highlight, to not just gloss over them, but think about the amazing truths that they represent. Our union with the Lord Jesus has given us a rich identity.

We will explore these ideas in particular:

We are part of a new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17
 We are children of God according to Philippians 2:15
 We are living stones says Peter in 1 Peter 2:5
 We are God's workmanship according to Ephesians 2:10
 We are light, see Ephesians 5:8
 We are a holy temple in 1 Corinthians 3:16
 We are disciples of Christ so says John 13:35
 We are members of the body according to Romans 12:5
 We are branches united to Christ in John 15:5
 We are royal priests of a nation referenced in I Peter 2:9

There are more, but isn't that a wonderful list to think about?

I hope that as women study these ideas as a group, or even in their private study, they will be encouraged to go about daily life, conscious of who they are in the Lord and are encouraged to live in that reality.

Jean Gaffin
 Springfield, Virginia.
 March 2018

¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Devoted to God*, (Banner of Truth Trust, 2016) p.81

CHAPTER ONE

YOU ARE A NEW CREATION

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

MEMORY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

I love New Year's Eve. I think it's worth waking up to watch the ball drop or Big Ben chime at 12 a.m. Ideally I'd stay awake until midnight, but I'm usually nodding off about 2 hours before that annual ritual. So I just wake my groggy self up for a few minutes to savor the turn of the year.

That means, of course, that my husband and I are wide awake early on New Year's Day when some neighbors are nursing a hangover. Even so, I love the first day of the New Year as well.

My daughters-in-law both grew up in churches that worshipped on New Year's Eve in gratitude for the blessings

of the past year and then again on New Year's morning to ask for God's guidance in the year to come.

Saying goodbye to the old year and welcoming the new is a reminder that God has designed our lives to have new beginnings. Every new week, the first of the month, every new school year, and, of course every January 1 are all helpful reminders that God has and will make all things new.

The most important first for us is the Lord's Day. As the Christian Sabbath, it memorializes the inauguration of the new creation.

What does that mean for you and me? If you love the Lord, it means he has made you new. You are part of a new reality in Christ. Your identity is new. Your hope is new. Your strength is new; in Jesus all is new. You are part of his new creation.

Around the New Year, or at other 'beginnings,' we often think in terms of resolutions. What am I going to do differently? What bad habits can I get rid of? How am I going to be a better person?

Why don't I lose 20 pounds? Exercise every day? Read my Bible daily.

All good ideas, aren't they? Can we succeed?

We should know by now after many failed attempts, that without the grace that God supplies, we will often fail. Depending only on our will power, even our earnest commitments will come to nothing.

It's true that with grit, we human beings can accomplish a lot. But there comes that point at which we fail, if we are not living out of his grace.

We are weak in our own strength. We are dependent. We are limited. Our newness, in other words, isn't something we do for ourselves.

On the other hand, because we are new *in Christ*, we can have a genuine fresh start as we pursue godly goals. So we should be encouraged to live out our newness in Christ knowing that our power to change and grow in grace is from his Spirit. Yes, we can find strength to change.

Our memory verse for this chapter says it so well: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come' (2 Cor. 5:17).

You are part of something new in Christ

You have a new heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26)

You have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9)

You have a new song (Ps. 40:3)

You walk in a new way (Gal. 5:16)

You look forward to the new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:13)

May this day find you rejoicing in your newness.

DIGGING DEEPER

Now let's look at our passage more closely. Do you see why we are new? We are part of a new creation. As 2 Corinthians 5:16 says, 'From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus

no longer.’ The NIV renders ‘according to the flesh’ as ‘from a worldly point of view’, in other words, in unbelief.

You and I, when we were unbelievers, regarded Christ according to the world’s point of view. We were ‘of the flesh.’ Flesh here means sinful opposition to God. It refers to our sinful nature and unbelief, who we are as sinners, and who we are in Adam.

If the Spirit has worked faith in our hearts, we now know Christ as our Lord and Savior; our new way is of the Spirit. We are united to Christ by faith and now in Him we belong to the new creation that God has inaugurated.

Christ has ushered in the new creation because he conquered the power of the flesh on the cross. What is new is of the Spirit. The old has passed away. Stop and think about that. What you are by nature has been conquered - the flesh - so that as you belong to the new creation you are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live more and more for the Lord and his glory.

We Belong To The New Creation And Are New Creatures

Jesus’ resurrection is the evidence of his victory over Satan and all that is of the sinful flesh, because of what he accomplished on the cross. The Bible tells us that when we repent and believe in Jesus, we are united to him in his death and resurrection.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live

in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

even when we were dead in our trespasses, (he) made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph. 2:5-6)

Our new life in Christ means a ‘radical transformation, a passing over from a condition of death and slavery to one of life and liberty.’² God has provided for us a transformation from the old order of the flesh to the new order of the Spirit because of Christ’s victory over sin and death on the cross.

My friend tells of her experience in being transformed from life in the flesh to the new life in the Spirit:

I grew up in a Christian home, attended a Bible believing church, and made a profession of faith in high school. However, by my junior year in college I had left Christianity and believed that there was no spiritual dimension to life.

I married a Buddhist man and moved to Thailand, where I became immersed in a culture rooted in animism and spirit worship. At first I was fascinated by such a different way of looking at the world. We had a tiny doll-sized house on our property called a ‘spirit house’ to provide a resting place for the spirits of the land. Every day

² Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1975), p.224.

my husband and the maids presented food and prayers at this shrine to appease the spirits and gain favor. They did the same with the Buddha statues in the house. We all wore amulets to ward off evil spirits. We visited temples and shrines to pray and offer incense and respect.

I became involved with fortune tellers on a regular basis. I participated in a ghastly séance. Over time, what I saw and experienced convinced me that this was REAL; there was indeed a spiritual presence which was active and powerful in the world. And this presence was often unpredictable and malevolent.

As the years passed, my marriage crashed and burned, bringing me a deep emptiness and hopelessness. I felt powerless and had nowhere to turn and I never once thought of turning to Jesus. But although I had rejected him, God had not rejected me, and when I was at my lowest, he dropped three books into my lap that spoke of Jesus and the Christian faith and spiritual warfare. And all of a sudden, in the midst of reading the third book, the spiritual blinders came off and I saw very clearly that those I had chosen to put my trust in, my fortune tellers and Buddhism were tools of Satan. The author challenged me to choose which side I was on, *the side of the flesh or of the Spirit* and I didn't hesitate. Right then and there I prayed and chose Jesus, and I knew I was somehow changed.

God confirmed this very dramatically within minutes of my coming to faith: while entering a room in my home, I experienced a strong, visceral sensation of a presence which was evil and malevolent, which I had NEVER felt before.

The presence of the Holy Spirit within me had made me sensitive to the spiritual darkness around me that I had been blind to previously. From that time on, whenever I passed in front of the Buddha statues, I would feel unsettled by a similar sensation, and I took care to avoid the line of their gaze. This sounds totally otherworldly, but it was very real and quite powerful. The Lord also showed me that I had crossed from *flesh to Spirit* in positive ways as well. He led me to a godly church and my first time there I walked through the doors and was overwhelmed by the feeling that I had come 'home'; I could not stop crying the entire service. I bought a Bible and devoured it. On its pages I found words and passages I had never seen before that jumped off the pages at me. Were those words really never there before, or was it that I now had eyes to see?

Many changes and challenges followed in the next weeks and months, but my joy in the Lord and the newness of life He gave me replaced the emptiness and hopelessness of before. Thirty-eight years later He is still my good God and He continues to give me joy and light in Him.³

³. My friend continues: 'Our loving Lord who brought me out of darkness into his marvelous light has been faithful to care and provide in the most tender and thoughtful of ways. He led me into remarriage to a godly Christian man; together we parented seven children and welcomed 18 grandchildren. A widow now, I remain actively involved at my church of 38 years. He has used sorrow and loss and blessing and fruitfulness to knead into my soul the truth that he will never leave me nor forsake me. He has given me so much - family and friends and fellowship and purpose in my life - but His greatest gift is Himself.'

Paul, A Persecutor, Becomes A New Creation

2 Corinthians 5:17 describes Paul's own experience. When he says 'if anyone is in Christ' he is marveling that he, too, who persecuted Christians, is now in Christ and belongs to the new creation. This verse 'summarizes the changes in his own life.'⁴ This verse is a gracious invitation to anyone to come to Christ, to participate in this new creation. If Paul could be transformed, so can anyone.

But I Don't Feel Very New

It could be lack of sleep, envy of other women, an uncooperative husband, rebellious kids, headaches, or discouragement about the sin in our life – any number of things, which deflate us and defeat us. We don't feel new at all. And yet, we are not who we were before we believed in Christ. Never forget that. It is crucial to our whole outlook. Even though we don't see much personal progress, we need to take hold of this truth.

When you get up in the morning with a migraine, remember that migraine is of the passing order of sin and death, and that order is disappearing because it was defeated on the cross. Someday you will have a head free of pain. Today, perhaps you can benefit from some medication, but you also have a Lord in heaven who is refining you like gold in the process.

⁴ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p.297.

You are one who 'has put on the new man which is after God in contrast with the old man which is after the flesh.'⁵

A New World Order Has Dawned

You and I don't each stand alone as a new creation here and a new creation there. Rather we are part of something much bigger; the new world order ushered in by Christ's victory namely, his kingdom. He rules over the entire creation.

The new creation 'is not merely individual, but the new world of re-creation that God has made to dawn in Christ.'⁶ He who is in Christ, therefore participates in, belongs to, this new world order of God.

This is a cosmic matter. That's why one day, at the last judgment, God will renew this physical world and raise our physical bodies so that we will be fully perfected in his new creation.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning

⁵ Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1962), p.202.

⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul An Outline of His Theology*, (ET, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 45

together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

‘[T]hings that are not formed anew by the Spirit of God’⁷ are passing away, the new has come. The old persists, of course, and the new has not yet fully come, but our lives are of the Spirit, not any longer of the flesh. These are hard, even dizzying concepts to comprehend, aren’t they?

Can you see why thinking of our salvation only as a fire escape from hell, misses the glory for which we have been saved? We are part of the new creation that God has inaugurated where all that belongs to the realm of evil will be vanquished forever and is now passing away because of the decisive victory of Christ on the cross and in his resurrection.

How To Live As Belonging To The New Creation

As one who is part of this new creation, our first priority as women is to sit at Jesus’ feet, to learn about him and to learn from him. He is our perfection. He is our righteousness. He gives us his Spirit and his Word. In Jesus, and only in Him, we are and are becoming truly new because we are becoming more like Him.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 234 (on 2 Cor. 5:17)

QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. List some deeds of the flesh. What would the opposite of these deeds look like in those who are a new creation in Christ?
2. Since you have believed in Jesus, you have been transformed and made new at the core of your being. Does this imply that we can be sinless? Can you find some verses that would answer this question? E.g. 1 John 1:8-9.
3. What of the old you is gone? What is still ‘warring’ in you? Read Romans 7 to see how Paul describes this battle.
4. Are you encouraged or bewildered when you hear that you are part of a new creation in Christ? Why?
5. How is God’s strength made perfect in our weakness as his new creation?
6. Can a person who is of the new creation order revert to his or her former self of the flesh? Why or why not?

PERSONAL JOURNALING AND REFLECTIONS

- Have I laid all my sins at Jesus' feet for his forgiveness?
- Do I still feel guilty? Why?
- What are the obstacles to my thinking I am a new creation in Christ?
- What standards do I use that are not biblical?
- Reflect on Ezekiel 36:26; Colossians 3:9-10; Galatians 6:15; Romans 7:6
- What do they tell us about this newness?

Notes...
