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BEING CHRISTIAN

*Who We Are &
What We Do in Christ*

JIM WILSON

Dedicated to Roy & Karen Knecht

for being Christian

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PREFACE

This book is the second edition of a collection of devotionals originally published under the title *On Being a Christian: Who We Are and What We Do in Christ*. The essays in this edition were written over a period of thirty-five years. As the title indicates, many of them have to do with “being” and “doing.” Some of them have appeared in my blog “Roots by the River” (www.rootsbytheriver.blogspot.com) and in an email circulation of weekly devotionals called “Day and Night.” Here they are arranged generally by subject.

This is not a novel or a biography; it has no plot. If you read it straight through, you may miss the message. You may open the book to any page and find something to meditate on and apply in your life.

The first objective of this book is best stated in St. Paul’s comment to the Colossians: “that we may present everyone perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28).

My second objective is to help you see the Scripture, not my comments. Years ago, our oldest son said something that he

meant to be funny. “Dad’s idea of teaching is to quote another verse.” You will see as you read that he hit the nail on the head. This book is full of strong texts and short teaching. Good Bible teachers cannot take a strong text and make it stronger. They can make it weaker, or they can change it (and make it weaker still). They may not have that intention, but it is like adding water to the soup. It goes farther, but it *is* weaker.

Strong teaching makes strong Christians. And it makes soft-hearted, tender, loving Christians. But soft teaching makes hard, callused Christians. Soft teaching is for people who have itching ears. They do not wish to have their lives interfered with.

Because the teaching in the texts is strong, you may not want to read this book quickly. Take time, meditate, and soak in the Scriptures until your heart and mind agree with them without qualification. Please feel free to disagree with my comments—they may just be water in the soup.

I would like to hear from you if these writings have helped you become more like Jesus. Comments and edits are also welcome (www.canonpress.com/contact-us).

I would like to thank Jan Mahal for typing up many of the older essays; Jen Miller for editing and arranging the newer essays; and Lisa Just for editing this second edition.

All Scripture quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise stated.

In the Lord Jesus Christ,

Jim Wilson

Moscow, Idaho

2016

*We've attached a potential schedule for reading all of **Being Christian** in one year. However, as Jim Wilson wrote, "If you read it straight through, you may miss the message. You may open the book to any page and find something to meditate on and apply in your life." So, feel free to vary as you feel led!*

✓	WEEK #	SECTION HEADINGS	READING
	Wk 1	Being Christian	Preface & Ch. 1 (pp. VII–5)
	Wk 2	Compromise ~ Self-Control	Ch. 2 (pp. 7–12)
	Wk 3	First Things First ~ Truth	Ch. 2 (pp. 12–18)
	Wk 4	Teaching the Truth ~ Evidence of the Spirit	Ch. 2 (pp. 18–22)
	Wk 5	Seeing God ~ Knowing the Father	Ch. 3 (pp. 23–29)
	Wk 6	As God Sees Things ~ God's Grace	Ch. 3 (pp. 29–36)
	Wk 7	Proclaiming & Praying ~ Confident Prayer	Ch. 4 (pp. 37–43)
	Wk 8	Persevering in Prayer ~ Pray for Workers	Ch. 4 (pp. 43–48)
	Wk 9	Evangelism ~ Opening Eyes	Ch. 5 (pp. 49–55)
	Wk 10	Spiritually Discerned ~ Our Freedom	Ch. 5 (pp. 55–61)
	Wk 11	Justice or Vengeance? ~ Why the Teaching?	Ch. 5 (pp. 61–66)
	Wk 12	Love & Peace ~ The Spring of Living Water	Ch. 5 (pp. 66–71)
	Wk 13	Our Primary Source ~ Biography	Ch. 6 (pp. 73–79)
	Wk 14	Book Publishing ~ The Cultured & the Ignorant	Ch. 6 (pp. 79–86)
	Wk 15	God's Grace & Our Faith ~ Grace & Faith 2	Ch. 7 (pp. 87–91)
	Wk 16	Faith & Obedience ~ Love & Obedience	Ch. 7 (pp. 92–96)
	Wk 17	What Are We To Obey? ~ The Word	Ch. 7 (pp. 97–105)
	Wk 18	You Died with Christ ~ Obedience Is Easy	Ch. 7 (pp. 105–112)
	Wk 19	Obeying Immoderate Commands ~ Partial Obedience	Ch. 7 (pp. 112–118)
	Wk 20	Aspects of Obedience ~ Walking in the Light	Ch. 7 (pp. 118–126)

✓	WEEK #	SECTION HEADINGS	READING
	Wk 21	Positive Obedience ~ Forgiveness & Consequences	Ch. 7 (pp. 126–132)
	Wk 22	Revenge ~ A Well of Living Water	Ch. 7 (pp. 133–139)
	Wk 23	The Word of Authority ~ Read the New Testament	Ch. 8 (pp. 141–147)
	Wk 24	Scripture—True or False? ~ Meditation	Ch. 8 (pp. 148–155)
	Wk 25	God's Direction ~ Knowing the Will of God	Ch. 9 (pp. 157–163)
	Wk 26	Life & Doctrine ~ Sound Doctrine	Ch. 9 (pp. 163–172)
	Wk 27	Rich Generosity ~ Damage Control	Ch. 9 (pp. 172–178)
	Wk 28	In the World or of the World ~ Coveting Your Neighbor's Stuff	Ch. 9 (pp. 179–184)
	Wk 29	Coveting Your Own Stuff ~ Godliness & Trials	Ch. 9 (pp. 184–189)
	Wk 30	Persecution ~ Accountability	Ch. 9 (pp. 189–195)
	Wk 31	Guilt & Ignorance ~ Forgiving Others	Ch. 9 (pp. 195–200)
	Wk 32	Forgiven ~ Forgiveness & Bitterness	Ch. 9 (pp. 200–207)
	Wk 33	Taking Offense ~ Forgiving Yourself	Ch. 9 (pp. 207–212)
	Wk 34	Forgiveness & Restitution ~ Making Restitution	Ch. 9 (pp. 212–218)
	Wk 35	Humility ~ Reconciliation	Ch. 9 (pp. 218–225)
	Wk 36	Slow to Anger ~ A Clean Conscience	Ch. 9 (pp. 225–233)
	Wk 37	Righteousness & Peace 1 ~ Trust	Ch. 9 (pp. 233–238)
	Wk 38	Respect for Authority ~ Wisdom	Ch. 9 (pp. 239–245)
	Wk 39	Wisdom & Folly ~ God's Justice & Faithfulness	Ch. 9 (pp. 246–252)
	Wk 40	God's Forgiveness ~ The Full Armor	Ch. 9 (pp. 252–259)

✓	WEEK #	SECTION HEADINGS	READING
	Wk 41	The Overflow of the Heart ~ The Tongue	Ch. 10 (pp. 261–265)
	Wk 42	Bad Words & Good Words ~ Politeness	Ch. 10 (pp. 265–271)
	Wk 43	Knowledge or Love? ~ Gossip	Ch. 10 (pp. 271–276)
	Wk 44	Dealing with Gossip ~ Keeping Confidence	Ch. 10 (pp. 276–279)
	Wk 45	Continual Joy ~ Lack of Joy	Ch. 11 (pp. 281–285)
	Wk 46	Substitutes for Joy ~ Songs of Joy	Ch. 11 (pp. 285–289)
	Wk 47	Praise ~ “I Will Praise Him”	Ch. 11 (pp. 289–292)
	Wk 48	Loving God ~ Christ-like Love	Ch. 12 (pp. 293–299)
	Wk 49	Loving the Unlovely ~ Love the Alien	Ch. 12 (pp. 300–306)
	Wk 50	Husbands ~ Fathers & Children	Ch. 13 (pp. 307–314)
	Wk 51	Rearing Children ~ Generations	Ch. 13 (pp. 314–321)
	Wk 52	Fix Your Eyes ~ Benediction	Ch. 14 (pp. 323–325)

DEAD

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. (Eph. 2:1)

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Rom. 6:1–2)

When it comes to sin, we are all dead. We are either “dead in” sin or “dead to” it. When we were dead *in* sins, we lived in them. Once we are dead *to* sin, living in it is neither normal nor possible. A Christian may sin, but he cannot make it his way of life:

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 Jn. 3:6, 9)

OBEYING THE COMMANDS

And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!” (Mk. 7:9)

J.B. Phillips translates this, “It is wonderful to see how...” The Pharisees and the teachers of the law made a sophisticated effort to disobey.

Just before Jesus said this, He quoted the prophet Isaiah:

These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. (Is. 29:13)

Nonreligious people do not need elaborate reasons to disobey. They do it deliberately, are ignorant of the commandments, or simply do not care about obeying. Religious people come up with complicated rationalizations to make their wrongs look right. On top of this, they teach their disobedience to others. I have used the word “religious” here, but Christians are also guilty of this.

Read through the New Testament, keeping an eye out for the commandments. There are many (those in Colossians 3 and 1 Thessalonians 5, for example). Write down your expositions of them.

Do you have involved explanations for why you do not have to obey?

REPENTANCE

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you

the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.” (Mt. 21:28–32)

Jesus is not teaching the merits of delayed obedience in this passage. He is teaching repentance for both the person who initially refused and for the one who promised to obey and did not.

The Pharisees were like the second son who said he would work and did not. The Pharisees knew the law, but they thought that being able to quote it was the same as obeying it. The prostitutes and tax collectors were the first son. They had no intention of obeying and said so. John the Baptist came preaching repentance to Pharisees, tax collectors, and prostitutes. The latter two repented. The Pharisees did not think that they needed to repent.

When my wife Bessie was in Japan over sixty years ago, a young man named Kai came to see her. Their conversation went something like this:

“Miss Dodds, I want to become a Christian.”

Bessie began to explain sin to him.

“Oh, Miss Dodds, you have it all wrong. You see, I am not a sinner. I am not like other boys. I am good, and I want to become a Christian.”

Bessie replied, “Kai, I cannot help you. Neither can Jesus. Come back when you are a sinner.” She took him to the door. She did not think she would see him again. A few weeks later he came back, admitted he was a sinner, repented of his sins, and put his faith in the Lord Jesus.

OBEDIENCE IS EASY

Why is obedience so hard?

- Obedience is an infringement on our freedom. Since we are free in Christ, we conclude that obedience must not be good. Yet we know it *is* good. Thus, we become confused.
- Obedience means works. We have been justified by grace through faith and are opposed to works, so we are also opposed to obedience.
- We have tried to obey and failed—frequently. Therefore, the only solution must be to disobey and confess.
- We confuse obedience to men with obedience to God.

Each of these statements is a misconception. Here are the corrections:

- Obedience is freedom, not an infringement of it. It is a voluntary act, which means it can only take place if the will is *free*.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (Jn. 8:32)

- Obedience is not related to works. It is related to faith.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as

his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Heb. 11:7–8)

Obedience does not earn us salvation; that has been paid for already. When we obey, we are acting by faith.

- Trying to obey is the opposite of trusting to obey. When we try, we are being self-centered, not God-centered. When we trust God, He provides the strength for us to obey.
- Although obedience to God and obedience to man can be the same thing (see Rom. 13, 1 Pet. 2 and 3, Ephesians 5 and 6, Col. 3, and Tit. 2), sometimes they are not (Col. 2:20–23, Mk. 7, 1 Tim. 4:1–5, and Acts 4:19–20). We can avoid confusion if we know the Scriptures well enough to differentiate between the commands of men and the commands of God.

When you set out to obey God, remember these things:

- God provides a way out of sin in every situation (1 Cor. 10:13).
- We are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Obedience is the natural way of life for those who live by the Spirit of God (see Gal. 5:22–23).
- Jesus died that we might be dead to sin (Rom. 6, 1 Pet. 2:24).
- God gave us the Scriptures to prevent sin (1 Jn. 2:1).

God wants us to obey Him, and He knows that we cannot do it on our own. He wonderfully provides for our obedience

by His death and resurrection and His gifts of faith, grace, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and a new and glorious nature.

Sin is based on two things: a lie and a rebellion. Many of us, like Eve, have believed a lie. Once we buy the lies, rebellion is the consequence.

*But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his **subtlety**, so your minds should be corrupted from the **simplicity** that is in Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3 KJV)*

OBEYING IMMODERATE COMMANDS

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. (2 Thess. 3:16)

*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **equip you with everything good for doing his will**, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20–21)*

Please look at every phrase in these benedictions, for I will not comment on all of them. Notice that God gives us peace “*at all times and in every way*” and equips us with “*everything good for doing His will.*” The God of peace does a thorough work in us.

If you are familiar with the Bible, you may have noticed that it has very few moderate commands. You may also have

noticed how many Christians moderate the commands. We think it is alright to bring them down to our size because they are so extreme. This is neither honest nor necessary.

The Bible also contains many great promises like the ones I have just quoted. In the immoderate promises God gives us what we need to obey the immoderate commands.

BE HOLY

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”
(1 Pet. 1:15–16)

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt. 5:48)

These are commands, not suggestions. They are also “be” commands, not “do” commands—they relate to what you *are*, not just what you do. Since we live by God’s grace, it is safe to assume that He will not command us to be something that He does not provide the means for us to be. Therefore, we should not think that these commands are impossible to obey. If we do, we are not believing God. We are following the suggestions of the Enemy.

Thank God that He has made holiness possible for you. Start obeying by *believing* that it is possible and by *wanting* to be holy.

BEING SELF-CONTROLLED & ALERT

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Pet. 5:8)

Of all the reasons Christians sin, this one is the most disheartening. It happens to very strong Christians who are not alert.

When I was midshipman over sixty years ago, there was a framed picture in the Department of Seamanship and Navigation at the Naval Academy. It was a photograph of seven destroyers grounded on the beach in the Santa Barbara Channel in California. There are eight destroyers in a squadron. The captain of the eighth destroyer decided not to follow the leader. Underneath the picture was this caption: "The price of good navigation is constant vigilance."

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down." (Rev. 12:9–10)

The name of the ancient serpent is the Accuser. I am aware of churches whose elders are accusing or being accused. Some of the accusation is within a church, and some of it is between churches. The saints in these churches may have believed a lie that a fellow believer is the enemy. The fellow believer may have believed a lie and passed it on as truth. That puts him in the wrong camp. It makes him an accuser and a gossip, but he is never the enemy, even if he is in great sin.

There seems to be a misreading or misapplication of Ephesians 5:8-14a:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.

- What we are: “*Light in the Lord*”
- What we are commanded: “*Live as children of light.*”
- What light is: “*All goodness, righteousness and truth.*”
- Additional comment: “*Find out what pleases the Lord.*”
- Negative comment: “*Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.*”
- Positive comment: “*Expose them.*”
- How not to expose them: “*For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.*”
- How to expose them: “*Light exposes.*”

The misapplication is that people think that the way to expose the fruitless deeds of darkness is to talk about them. When we expose deeds of darkness this way, we mention “what the disobedient do in secret.” But this passage says that is shameful. It is our *life of light* that should expose things, not our talk of darkness. The accuser should confess the accusations he has made. The accused should not defend against the accuser or accusations, but if he has sinned, he should confess it to the Lord.