

WHO I AM IN CHRIST

Neil T. Anderson



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Neil T. Anderson, *Who I Am in Christ*

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To my daughter, Heidi, and son-in-law, Keith Anderson, I dedicate this book. You are starting a new journey in life together with the joyful blessing of both sets of your parents. May the message of this book be what keeps you together in Christ.

Introduction

I am thankful for my heritage. I was born and raised on a farm in Minnesota, where I walked a mile to a country school for my first 6 years of education. My social life revolved totally around my family, school, and church. Church was a regular experience for me, but somehow during those formative years of my life, I was never confronted with the need to make a decision about my relationship to Christ. I never really understood what the gospel was all about. I was 25 years old before I finally realized who God is and why Jesus came. It would be another 15 years before I finally realized who I am as a child of God.

Tragically, most Christians *never* come to appreciate who they are in Christ. From the time of birth we are programmed by our environment and the people in our lives. We interpret the meaning of life's experiences through the grid of our personal orientation and react accordingly. For the many who have experienced rejection, abandonment or abuse from earliest childhood, entrenched in their belief systems is an attitude that says, "I am of no value," "I don't measure up," "I am unlovable." Even those of us whose childhood seemed wholesome have been victimized in some way by the enemy's subtle deceptions.

Without exception, all the people I have counseled have had some unscriptural belief the enemy has used to keep them in bondage. It is important to recognize faulty beliefs from the past, to renounce them as lies, and to reprogram and renew our minds with truth.

Physically Alive, Spiritually Dead

Genesis 2:7 says, "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Adam was alive in two ways: First, he was alive physically—his soul, or soul-spirit, was in union with his physical body. Second, he was alive spiritually—his soul, or soul-spirit, was in union with God.

In Genesis 2:16,17 we read, "The Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" Well, Adam disobeyed God, and he ate of that tree. Did he die physically? Not initially, although the physical process of dying did begin, but he died spiritually, and it was dramatically realized by his separation from God.

From that time on, everyone born into this world is physically alive but spiritually dead, separated from God. Before coming to Christ, we had neither the presence of God in our lives nor the knowledge of His ways, so we learned to live independent of Him. Ephesians 2:1 says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." What does it mean that we were dead? Were we dead physically? Of course not, but we were dead spiritually; we were separated from God.

Jesus came to remove that separation. He said in John 10:10, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." In the early years of my Christian experience, I thought eternal life was something I got when I died, but 1 John 5:11,12 says, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." Every Christian is

alive in Christ *right now*. To be alive means that your soul is in union with God. Throughout the New Testament you will repeatedly see the truth that you are in Christ or that Christ is in you. It is this life that gives us our essential identity.

Our New Identity

Colossians 3:10,11 says we "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

In other words, how we formerly identified ourselves no longer applies. When asked to describe themselves, people usually mention race, religion, cultural background or social distinctions. But Paul said none of those apply anymore, because our identity is no longer determined by our physical heritage, social standing or racial distinctions. Our identity lies in the fact that we are all children of God and we are *in Christ*.

Although I am thankful for my physical heritage, I am far more grateful for my spiritual heritage. The practical significance of this essential truth cannot be overstated. A Christian gains forgiveness, receives the Holy Spirit, puts on a new nature and gets to go to heaven. A Christian, in terms of his or her deepest identity, is also a saint, a child born of God, a divine masterpiece, a child of light, a citizen of heaven.

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9,10).

At a conference I conducted several years ago, a missionary attended who was required to come back from the field because of deep emotional problems. She had a very difficult childhood, having been raised in a dysfunctional family. At the conference, she realized for the first time who she was in Christ and resolved her spiritual conflicts. It was as though she was born again.

When she went home to her family some time later, she heard even more devastating news about her upbringing. She made an appointment with me and told me about the family problems she was having. I commented to her, "Aren't you glad that you learned this new information after you found out who you are as a child of God?"

She responded, "Oh, if I had heard this about my family two months ago, it would have been the final blow."

I said, "Now that you know this about your family, what does that do to your heritage?"

She started to answer. Then a smile broke across her face and she said, "Nothing!"

She realized she is a child of God and had appropriated the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Learning Our New Identity

We are no longer products of our past. We are primarily products of Christ's work on the cross. But remember, when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, we had learned to live our life independent of God. Our identity and perception of ourselves were formed and programmed into our minds through the natural orders of this world. That's why Paul says in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Renewing our minds does not come naturally; there is no automatic "delete button" that erases past programming. We have to consciously know the Word of God so that we can understand who we are from God's perspective. And who are we? As 1 John 3:1-3 says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

Who We Are Determines What We Do

The most important belief that we possess is a true knowledge of who God is. The second most important belief is who we are as children of God, because we cannot consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with how we perceive ourselves. And if we do not see ourselves as God sees us, then to that degree we suffer from a wrong identity and a poor image of who we really are.

It is not what we do that determines who we are. It is who we are that determines what we do, as illustrated by a letter I received from a missionary:

I am writing in response to reading *Victory Over the Darkness*. I am sure you have received many letters, at least I hope you have, because that means people like me have had their eyes opened to God's truth.

I am a missionary, and even though I have been a Christian for 21 years, I never understood God's forgiveness and my spiritual inheritance. I have been bulimic since 1977. I was in Bible college at the time I began this horrible practice. I never thought this living hell would end. I have wanted to die, and I would have killed myself had I not thought that was a sin. I felt God had turned His back on me and I was doomed to hell because I couldn't overcome this sin. I hated myself. I felt like a failure.

But the Lord led me to purchase your book and bring it with me. I began reading it last week. I feel like a new Christian, like I have just been born again. My eyes are now open to God's love. I realize I am a saint who sins, not a sinner. I can finally say I am free, free of Satan's bondage and aware now of the lies he has been filling me with. Before, I would confess to God and beg His forgiveness when I binged and purged. Yet the next time, I fell deeper into Satan's grasp because I couldn't forgive myself, and I couldn't accept God's forgiveness. I also thought the answer lay in drawing closer to God, yet I went to Him in fear and confusion, acting as a sinner who couldn't be loved. No more!

Through the Scriptures and the way you presented them, I am no longer a defeated Christian. I don't consider myself a bulimic; I consider myself a saint, salt of the earth, Christ's friend, a slave of righteousness. Food has no power over me. Satan has lost his grip on me.

This missionary's testimony is typical of the hundreds of people I have had the privilege of counseling. As these troubled

people shared their stories with me, one common thread was woven throughout: None of them knew who they were as children of God. They had no personal, internal sense of their identity in Christ.

We are not “sinners in the hands of an angry God!” It is my prayer that you will clearly see what the Bible teaches—that every child of God is a saint held securely in the hands of a loving God.

Satan Doesn't Want You to Know

This book is broken into three sections; each section contains a number of verses related to the section topics: Our Acceptance, Our Security and Our Significance in Christ. Each of the verses in these three sections will broaden your concept of what it means to be a child of God.

One of the most common questions I receive from people who have read and been blessed by *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* is: “Now I understand the power of my identity in Christ. As well, the Lord has broken the bondage in my life. But how do I remind myself of my position in Christ? It’s so easy to forget!”

It is easy to forget our position in Christ. Why? Because Satan doesn’t want you to be free. How do you live each day consciously aware and active as a child of God? First and foremost, through Bible reading, prayer and fellowship. As well, this book can help you remember—on a daily basis—your wonderful position in Christ.

I am burdened for those who have never discovered their identity in Christ nor the freedom He brings. “My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ

Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Our tendency is to think only of our physical needs, but the critical needs are the "being" needs, and they are the ones most wonderfully met *in* Christ.

The secular world has identified these needs but is pitifully inadequate to meet them. Trying to pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps or stroking one another's ego is not going to get it done. What a privilege we have to tell the world how Christ has come to meet our most critical and foundational needs: identity, acceptance, security and significance.

It is my prayer that at the conclusion of this book you will have entered into the experience assured us in Galatians 4:6,7, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." In other words, I'm praying that you will experience a bonding relationship with your heavenly Father. This may be the primary role of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16).

As you read, study and meditate upon the meaning of these passages, be aware that Satan does not want you to know this. You may actually struggle in your thought life with opposing arguments about what God has to say about who you are. Let me encourage you to stand against that. If a lie is formed in your mind that is contrary to what the Bible says, then renounce that lie and accept God's truth. If possible, say aloud the prayers at the end of each chapter.

As well, at the back of the book I have included a list of Scripture truths regarding who we are in Christ. This is a composite list to help you remember your position as a child of God. You may want to tear out this page and keep it in your Bible, or place it on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror. Don't let the

enemy blind you to the truth of your precious identity!

One person suggested, "I would be prideful if I believed all these verses about myself." The answer is, "No, you would be defeated if you didn't." You are not who you are in Christ because of the things you have done; you are in Christ because of what He has done. He died and rose again so that you and I could live in the freedom of His love.

Part One

OUR ACCEPTANCE IN CHRIST

*“Accept one another, then,
just as Christ accepted you,
in order to bring praise to God.”*

ROMANS 15:7

1

CHAPTER

I Am Accepted

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

ROMANS 15:7

Rejection is one of the most painful experiences known to humanity. Years ago, I was having a devotional time with my children when I raised the question, “What is rejection?” My daughter, Heidi, gave a nice answer, but my son, Karl, followed by nailing the issue right on the heart. He said, “I know, rejection is when Johnny won’t play with me anymore and I have to play with Heidi.” Unconditional love and acceptance is one of the most basic needs of all humanity.

Striving for Acceptance

Notice the children around you. From earliest childhood, you can see them striving for acceptance and the approval of “significant others” in their lives. “Do you like my picture, Mommy?” “Did I play well, Daddy?” The social system in which most of us were raised gave us the impression that if we appeared good, performed well or had a certain amount of social status, we would finally be somebody. But try as we might to gain

approval, we always come up short. Whatever pinnacle of self-identity we are able to achieve eventually crumbles under the pressure of rejection or the criticism of self-condemnation.

We cannot do anything to qualify for unconditional and voluntary love. We labor under the false assumption that if we live perfectly everybody will accept us, while there was One who lived His life perfectly, and everybody rejected Him.

I regularly meet mature adults who still struggle for the approval of their parents or others. Ultimately, they compromise their spiritual integrity to avoid the rejection of man, as the following letter illustrates:

I came from a Christian family, and though there was a lot of bickering and hostility between my parents, I think I had an average childhood.

Everyone always said I looked like my dad, but unfortunately, my mother was often angry at my dad and resented his family. Many times, when I displeased my mother, she would say I was just like my father's sister, the one she often criticized.

My parents provided for our needs well and intellectually I knew I was loved, but the feeling and assurance of being totally accepted and okay always seemed to escape me. Even after 35 years of marriage and several grandchildren of my own, I was still subconsciously trying to earn my mother's approval and prove my love to her, resulting in many arguments between my husband and myself.

I first realized unconditional love at the age of 14 when I understood Christ's invitation in Revelation 3:20 and began a personal walk with Him. I was overwhelmed by His love, devoured Scripture and witnessed to all of

my friends. I have never consciously chosen to leave that precious relationship, but as I look back on my life I see how Satan has attacked me in my most vulnerable area, the need to know total love and acceptance.

During our years of marriage and a lifetime of ministry, I have been on some rabbit trails because I did not realize who I am in Christ. I have listened to negative thoughts against myself, thinking they were my own. I did not realize that Satan can use our past experiences and put thoughts in our minds to condemn and defeat us.

Neil, what blessed news to hear your teaching on our identity in Christ. I am no longer a product of my past, I am a product of the work of Christ on the cross. I know who I am now. I'm a child of God, and the basis for my acceptance is in Him, not in man. I got the chills when we sang the words of the theme song of your conference, "Resolving Personal and Spiritual Conflicts":

"In the Beloved" accepted am I,
 Risen, ascended, and seated on high;
 Saved from all sin thro' His infinite grace,
 With the redeemed ones accorded a place.
 "In the Beloved," God's marvelous grace
 Calls me to dwell in this wonderful place;
 God sees my Savior and then He sees me
 "In the Beloved" accepted and free.¹

Relating to Others

Understanding and receiving God's unconditional love is foundational for all future growth. We don't have to do things so

God will someday accept us. We are accepted by God completely as we are. Our actions and works should be in response to God's love for us, not an attempt to earn His favor.

Finding our acceptance in Christ serves as a basis for our relationship with other people as well. Paul writes in Romans 15:7, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Our need for acceptance and belonging are legitimate needs; they are God-given. But if we attempt to meet them independent of God, we are doomed to reap the dissatisfaction the self-life brings.

Peter admonishes us to lay aside the relentless pursuit of the approval of man. "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:1-5). Malice is wicked behavior that is often born out of our own sense of inadequacy when we look to others who have something we desperately need in order to be fulfilled.

Peer pressure is so powerful and the pursuit of man's approval so prevalent that people will compromise even their most basic moral principles to gain the acceptance of others. Lacking this, they begin to scheme and manipulate people or present a false image to gain approval. When this fails, they envy those who seem to have what they don't have, and then the natural consequence is to slander them to bring them down to their own level. So strong and devious is man's inner craving for significance apart from Christ!

No Need to Compete

But when you know who you are in Christ, you no longer need to be threatened by people or compete with them, because you are already secure and loved.

The Christian is to be like a newborn baby who knows nothing about guile, hypocrisy and envy. In reality we are like babies; we are newborn in Christ, and we are to long for the pure milk of the Word, because it is there we discover our true identity. Sure, we will sometimes experience the rejection of man, but we will never be cast away by our heavenly Father. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.

Let me encourage you as a newborn babe in Christ to long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, tasting the kindness, love and acceptance of the Lord. Take a moment to express your gratefulness to the Lord in prayer:



DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER, I pray that You would open my eyes so I may know and personally receive Your unconditional love and acceptance. I renounce the lies of Satan that question Your love and insist I must earn Your love and approval. I choose to believe that I am accepted in Christ. I ask for Your grace to sustain me as I face the rejection of mankind, and may You enable me to stand against the peer pressure that tempts me to compromise. In Jesus' precious name I pray. AMEN.

Note

1. Cevilla D. Martin, "In the Beloved." (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Co., © 1930, renewal 1958). Used by permission.