

Cruciform Press

WHO AM I?

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Jerry Bridges



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Cruciform Press | Released March, 2012

To Don, whose gracious perseverance in the face of
adversity has been a constant challenge to me.

–Jerry Bridges

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“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

J. I. Packer, Theological Editor, *ESV Study Bible*; author, *Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology*, and more; retired Professor of Theology, Regent College

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, *Tabletalk* magazine; general editor, *The Reformation Study Bible*; author, *The Holiness of God* and more than seventy other books

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

Richard D. Phillips, senior minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC; chairman, Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology; vice chairman, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals; author of *Jesus the Evangelist, The Masculine Mandate*, and many more

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INTRODUCTION

Who are you?

- The man sitting to my left at a dinner referred to himself as a carpenter. Carpentry is his vocation, but it is not who he is.
- A lady with a broken marriage said to a friend, “I am just a failure.” Although she had failed in her marriage, that is not who she is.
- I grew up in moderate poverty. To this day, my default answer to the question, “Who am I?” is, “I am the little boy growing up on the dirt street alongside the railroad track.” But that is not who I am.

These three responses illustrate the common tendency to answer the question, “Who am I?”, in terms of some subjective experience. Many of us answer in terms of our vocation. Others focus on a particularly formative or emotional experience.

I serve with the Navigators collegiate ministry, primarily focusing on staff development. But I am familiar enough with the student scene to know that many young people arrive at college from difficult family backgrounds,

or carrying the baggage of their own sinful lifestyles during their high school days. As a result, many of them have low or even negative self-images. Many, if honest, would answer the question, “Who am I?”, in terms of their negative or sinful experiences.

As Christians, however, our identity is to be found in our relationship with Christ, not in our subjective and often negative life experiences. In our ministry to students, therefore, we seek to help them become aware of their “position and identity in Christ,” so that their answer to the question, “Who am I?”, is based on what it means to be “in Christ.”

There is no short and simple answer to the question, “Who am I in Christ?” That position involves both privileges and responsibilities. It involves some tremendously astounding truths about us, but also faces us with some sobering facts that are just as true.

In this book we are going to look at eight different answers to the question, “Who am I?” It is my prayer that these eight answers will give us a balanced, biblical view of what it means to be in Christ.

One

I AM A CREATURE

When we begin to answer the question, “Who am I?”, we need to start with the most basic truth about us: we are created beings. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). While being made in God’s image puts us on an entirely different plane from any of the animals, we are still creatures. This makes us both dependent upon God and accountable to God.

Utterly Dependent

One of the most basic truths about all creatures is that we are dependent on God. Psalms 145:15-16 says, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” This passage refers primarily to the animal kingdom, but the principle of dependency applies to human beings as well.

Food. In most respects, we share our dependencies with the animal kingdom. However, there is at least one significant difference. God ordained that we humans should work to produce much of our food (see Genesis 2:15), and

in this very work we can develop a sense of independence from God. We begin to think that our material needs are met solely through our own hard work or (the modern-day equivalent) our business acumen, which provides us with the means to purchase food. God specifically warned the nation of Israel of this danger when he said,

Beware lest you say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.” You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (Deuteronomy 8:17-18)

Life and breath. We have a need more basic than food; we are dependent on God for our very life, even our breath. Acts 17:25 says, “nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” Every breath we breathe is a gift from God. And every day of life is also a gift from him. As David said, “My times are in your hands” (Psalms 31:15).

Plans. We are dependent on God for the execution of our plans. Everyone makes plans. In fact, life would be rather chaotic without plans. And we assume that we will usually carry out those plans. But James said this is not so. Rather he says,

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year

there and trade and make a profit”-- yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-15)

James does not rebuke his readers for making plans, even plans to make a profit in business. What he condemns is presumptuous planning—the attitude that we can carry out our plans apart from the sovereign will of God.

In the summer of 2011, I was scheduled to teach at a collegiate summer training program in Branson, Missouri. Plans were made and tickets were purchased. My wife had even arranged to have dinner with a cousin living nearby. But instead of being in Branson that week, I spent several days in a local hospital due to an unexpected heart problem. My experience is not unusual. Most of us can recall instances when some big plans we had made were overruled by God’s plan for us. Truly we are dependent on God to carry out every detail of our lives, whether it is a major vacation or a trip to the corner grocery store.

Abilities. We are dependent upon God for our abilities, our spiritual gifts, and our talents. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

Every so often I encounter one of those “self-made men,” the kind who might claim to have “pulled himself up by his own bootstraps.” He likes to tell you how he

started from nothing and became successful. Some of you reading this book may have experienced that. But why did God bless your plans, why did God bless your efforts? What do you have that you did not receive? Every ability—mental ability or business ability, whether it's in the fine arts or athletics or whatever it might be—it's all a gift from God. We are utterly dependent upon him.

Obviously, the wider culture in which we live today fails to recognize that we are dependent on God for everything. Often, it rejects the idea outright. And as the influence of the culture almost inevitably infiltrates our thinking as Christians, we can begin to forget we are totally dependent on God for every aspect of our lives.

To elaborate on our dependence before God just a bit more, we can see our dependence as falling into two general categories: physical fragility and spiritual vulnerability.

Physically Fragile

As dependent creatures, we are physically fragile—subject to accidents and diseases and all kinds of things. My first wife, who is now enjoying the presence of God, was always in good health. She seldom had a cold and never had the flu. The only time she had to be in a hospital was to deliver babies. But one day she went to the doctor for what she thought would be a routine examination. Before the day was over we knew she had cancer, and 17 months later she died. We are physically fragile. Regardless of how healthy we may appear today we do not know what tomorrow will bring for us.

A friend who was a missionary in Africa died at the early age of 62. Doctors did an autopsy to determine the cause of this untimely and rather sudden death and discovered that he was a victim of a combination of germs and viruses and parasites that he had picked up during years of service in Africa. Another friend was riding his bicycle early one morning for exercise and accidentally drove into a curb and went right over the handlebars, hitting his head on the concrete and breaking just about every bone in his face. We are very fragile.

Proverbs 27:1 says we do not know what a day will bring. For that matter we don't even know what the next hour will bring. You can undoubtedly supply your own stories of friends or relatives who have experienced unexpected illnesses or life-shattering accidents. So we need to recognize how fragile we really are, and as a result become aware of our total dependence on God.

Spiritually Vulnerable

As dependent creatures we are also spiritually vulnerable. We have three enemies: the world, the devil and our own sinful flesh. The world—the totality of humanity that is set in opposition to God—is constantly seeking to conform us to its own standards and values. The devil comes to us disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), seeking to sow doubt in our minds as to the love and faithfulness of God toward us. And then, worst of all, we have our sinful flesh which constantly strives against the Spirit who resides in us.

In the field of espionage there is often a person called

a *mole*. Typically, a mole works inside a sensitive area of government, blending in as an apparent “team player,” when in fact he or she is serving as the eyes and ears of an opposing power. This person is actually a traitor, to all appearances working for one government, but in actuality working for its enemy.

In many ways, our sinful flesh acts as a mole. It is constantly responding to the allurements of the world and the enticements of the devil, and is constantly seeking to collaborate with them. And so we are very vulnerable spiritually.

The recognition that we are physically fragile and spiritually vulnerable should make us more conscious of our complete dependence on God. As I write these words I have just passed my eighty-second birthday. As I get older it seems that God is increasing my own awareness of my dependence on him in every area of life. Do-it-yourself projects around the house that used to come easily to me don’t anymore. So I often find myself crying out to God to help me complete ordinary tasks that I used to do routinely. I think this growing sense of dependency is due to more than growing older. I think it is part of God’s process of maturing me as a believer. The same thing is true in both my physical life and my spiritual life. The truth, however, is that in my younger years I was just as dependent on God as I am now. I just did not recognize it.

Morally Accountable

Human beings are also different from other creatures in that God created us in his image. Central among all the

things that may be included in that truth is the fact that we possess a moral dimension; we have the ability to know right from wrong, and the ability to obey or disobey God. This means that as moral creatures we are accountable to God. God stressed this accountability to the first man, Adam. Genesis 2:16-17 says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” With that commandment, God makes Adam accountable.

This theme of accountability continues throughout the Bible. In Genesis 4, God holds Cain accountable for the murder of his brother. In Exodus 20, God gives Israel the Ten Commandments, obviously implying accountability for obedience. In Psalms 119:4 we read, “You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.” Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Paul said, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Finally, at the end of the age, the dead will be judged according to what they had done (Revelation 20:13). So from the creation of Adam until the end of time God holds human beings accountable to him for keeping his commandments. We are not free simply to disobey God and expect it will make no difference. This is what it means to be morally accountable.

But just as we tend to ignore or even reject the reality of our total dependence on God, so we frequently ignore or reject our accountability to him. Some years ago I

began to read a book titled *The Day America Told the Truth*. It was so discouraging I didn't finish it. The book was written by two men who had traveled throughout the United States, randomly interviewing people about their private lives and moral standards. They concluded that each person in America has, in effect, developed his own ten commandments. That is, as a nation we no longer see ourselves as accountable to God, only to self.

This is the attitude of the world we live in. And if we do not proactively remind ourselves that we are accountable to God, we can begin to think the same way—as long as we stay away from flagrant sins such as murder and sexual immorality, we tend to think that simply following our own code of conduct is good enough.

When I was a schoolboy, we had to memorize the poem *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley. To this day I recall the lines, “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.” At the time, we thought of that poem as teaching courage and fortitude. But it is actually a defiant statement of independence from God. And to some degree the sentiment behind those words is the default attitude of every human being. We don't like to be dependent and accountable, yet we are. Those words accurately apply to us as creatures, made in the image of God.

Application

What application should we make of the truth that we are dependent, fragile, vulnerable, and accountable?

Humility. First, this realization should produce

humility. Recognizing that I am absolutely dependent on God for every breath and every morsel of food; seeing that I am accountable to God for every thought, every word, and every action; and realizing how often I fail to honor God in these ways—these should produce a deep and abiding sense of humility.

Gratitude. Second, it should produce profound gratitude. Everything good in me or around me, whether spiritual or material, is a gift from God. More importantly, as one who has trusted in Christ as my Savior, I know that he has taken on himself the accountability for all my sins and has fully paid the penalty for my every act of disobedience.

I am a creature, created in the image of God, fully dependent on him and fully accountable to him.