

Having an Identity of Love

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace Church located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from messages preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

GRACE PUBLICATIONS
P.O. BOX 18715
BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.
Copyright © 1998

Grace Publications is a ministry of
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5

Chapter 1 7

EXTENDING ADAM'S EGO

Chapter 2 13

WHO AM I?

Chapter 3 19

WE ARE THE OBJECTS OF PERFECT LOVE

Chapter 4 26

DERIVING OUR IDENTITY FROM CHRIST

CONCLUSION 31

INTRODUCTION

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; *yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Our death with Christ on the Cross brings us into a place where only *God* can give us an identity. Adam’s identity ended in crucifixion. It’s no longer “I” (the old man), but “Christ” (the one new man) who lives in me.

Self-esteem is based upon self-worth. Self-worth ought to be based upon our value to God, and our value to God is revealed by Jesus Christ’s supreme sacrifice on the Cross on our behalf.

This message, though very practical, will deal with some things that we are years away from understanding. Our identity will either be an extension of Adam’s ego or an extension of the mind of Christ. The key to experiencing our eternal identity is to focus every thought on the

precepts of God's eternal Word: "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Chapter One

EXTENDING ADAM'S EGO

When a person's identity is based on a relationship outside of Christ, the relationship becomes a soul-power attachment. Countless people have their identity based upon soul attachments. Take away their attachment, and they have no identity at all. Take away the approval of others, and they are left without an identity.

Social relationships and familiar surroundings—where the flesh operates in measures of co-dependency upon a former lifestyle—bring a degree of security into a person's identity. There are women who consistently base their self-esteem on relationships rather than on their purpose, their value before God, and the eternal meaning of their life. This type of woman never thinks in terms of her personal eternal destiny, which was designed by God in eternity past. She may become involved in relationships that be-

come an extension of her ego.

For some men, their physique and a sense of power become an extension of their ego. With others, it may be money and materialism. A child may be very bright or he may excel in athletic ability, and though he should be appreciated, he should never become an extension of the parent's ego. On the other hand, a wife should never internalize the insensitivity of her husband or she will end up being unhappy and emotionally scarred from projections that bruise the ego.

In reality, so many relationships have no eternal value. They are nothing more than an extension of Adam's ego outside of a relationship with Christ. How many tears have been shed out of fleshly reaction or sentimentality and not because of spiritual compassion? How many bouts of depression have been just an extension of Adam's disappointment in his own purpose on the earth? How many marriages started out great, but because the husband and wife were living in a temporal extension of each other's flesh, the marriage ended up in a divorce court? How many soul-power attachments have resulted in one party growing weary of the attachment and leaving the other behind?

The Value of Right Thoughts and Right Choices

“And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12).

“Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:14-15).

When Jesus said in Luke 21:14-15, “Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate what ye shall answer,” He meant that if you meditate extensively on the Word of God then when you face problems or trials in the details of life, you won’t have to meditate on how you should answer, but He will give you “a mouth and wisdom” to answer out of what you have been taught.

What lacks in Christianity today is an understanding of the value of a single thought and the value of every succeeding thought. We can never underestimate the value of a choice that leads to a series of right choices. It is imperative

that we learn the value of godly communication that has its origin in godly thoughts and godly choices. Every godly action has great value because it flows from the springs of right thoughts (Philippians 4:8).

Right thoughts, right choices, and godly communication and action stem from our conditional responses to God's provision for us to think. Luke 12:11-12 and Luke 21:14-15 speak of conditional responses to the Word of God through the Holy Spirit.

The measure that God will reward us at the Bema Seat will be in proportion to the measure of each thought, each confession, and each action on the earth.

Without receiving God's provision to think through His Word, people are left to the conditional responses of their old sin nature. Anger is an extension of self-preservation through the ego; it is the conditional response of a person to something that happened in his past, or to the way he has been treated over the years. Lust is nothing more than the searching of a self-centered person who is trying to be fulfilled in human pleasure without taking responsibility for what the Word of God says in 2 Corinthians 10:5*b*, "Bringing into captivity every thought to

the obedience of Christ.”

Carnal Weapons or Captive Thoughts

In 2 Corinthians 10:1-4, Paul said, “Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, where-with I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds).”

Our whole problem lies in our use of *carnal weapons*. A carnal weapon is anything in my flesh that makes me comfortable while I still serve God in partial obedience. But in actuality, I am walking “afar off” from Him.

Remember, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4a). I don’t need anything to give me an extension of my ego so I can have security, false peace, and social success. The Bible says that the last shall be first (Mark 10:31), and that the one who serves shall be the greatest. This eliminates my dependence

on the temporal value system by bringing in the reality of God's eternal value system.

The apostle Paul says to pull down strongholds and get rid of the weapons of carnal warfare, because you will never have an identity in those things. Cast down the imaginations that come through people who don't have established identities, whose hearts are not fixed on God. Cast down every high thing that exalts itself against doctrine. Some people exalt where they want to be, what they want to do, or who they want to have around them against the knowledge of God. Others exalt their need for a relationship.

By bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, a person's decisions are revolutionized. It brings new value to each thought, each choice, each confession, and each act of obedience. He doesn't have to contemplate living in self-preference because his self-life is no longer on his agenda to be preserved.

Chapter Two

WHO AM I?

One of the questions that Moses, the great hero of faith, asked God was “Who am I?”

In searching for the answer to this question, consider the man in Mark 5:1-9 who was filled with six thousand demons. Jesus addressed the demons and said, “What is thy name?” The man answered, “Legion, for we are many.” Jesus asked something in the singular: “What is *thy* name?” But the answer came in the plural: “My name is Legion: for *we* are many.”

Though Christians cannot be possessed with demons, they are most assuredly troubled, influenced, and obsessed by these spirits. And the one question that needs to be answered in light of our past, our present, and our genetics is, “Who am I?”

Clearing Up Our Personal Identity

It's very easy for a child of God who has

been seasoned in Bible doctrine to say, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life I live in my humanity I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (see Galatians 2:20).

That is one of the most frequently quoted verses, and Christians *think* they know it. Certainly, it is a contributing factor to answering the question, “who am I,” but it’s only the premise.

Often, we meet people who had terrible marriages, and when the marriage fails, they continue to evaluate themselves on the basis of that failure. Others may fail miserably in another area, and after making a great recovery, Satan will tempt them to live in who they *were* instead of who they *are* now.

The Bible tells us that we are not to know anyone after the flesh—not even Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16). We must see Him as the ascended Lord seated on a Finished Work throne if we are to clear up the issue of our personal identity once and for all.

Having been a pastor for over forty years, I have seen that clearing up personal identity is a real problem for many people. Though we teach that every Christian should believe God, regard-

less of his condition, when sickness prevails, Satan would like to project to you that you *are* your sickness. "That's your identity," he says, "Jill the sick girl. You are always going to be sick."

Are You Receiving Projections or Protection?

There are some people who have battles with their emotions. They have made wonderful progress, but they are still in a process of healing. In one sense, they *are* healed but are still being healed, because life is like that; it is a process of right choices. And on given weeks or months, Satan tries to get these people to receive the grace of God in vain (see 2 Corinthians 6). He tells them, "You are an emotional wreck. The pastor was referring to *you* in the message." Of course, a true pastor is simply delivering the message that God wants His people to hear. Even when it stings, the goal is to edify and to set captives free.

Satan whispers to people, "Do you know who you are? You're an emotional vegetable." And providing they really had a deep-rooted problem to begin with, that person may experience a devastating ten or fifteen days as a result of that one projection.

In contrast, consider the wealthy—the multimillionaires. Many of them place their identity in their money. And every time they fail, they still have money to go on a trip, buy a boat, or throw a party. When they consider the answer to the question, “Who am I?” they think, “*I’m a rich person. I’m a wealthy person. That’s who I am*”—all the while covering up a very real need.

Then there are those who have been sexually abused and are left with deep-rooted infections. One precious woman told me, “For many years after being abused, every night I could still hear my stepfather coming into my room to take advantage of me. It was so real that his steps seemed audible. This continued to happen every night until I began coming to church and receiving doctrine regularly.”

Many others, like this woman, have been either raped or molested, and they cannot honestly answer the question, “Who am I?” Their hearts are after God, yet they have a difficult time knowing who they are. Even with a circle of good friends, they may at times feel downhearted or depressed.

Overcome and Undone, Here Am I!

Thank God that in the Body of Christ we

have so many opportunities to be built up in our spiritual identity. With so many true friends to reflect and draw out who we are in Christ, we only need to be available and to show ourselves friendly (Proverbs 18:24).

Yet, it seems that no matter how much people hear the message of the Finished Work, they are still attacked and troubled by demonic forces. Wrong habits and wrong reflections about life cause their self-image to become distorted.

We need to understand what the prophet Isaiah learned in his vision of Jesus Christ high and lifted up on a throne (see Isaiah 6:1-8). Isaiah saw the seraphim—six-winged high ranking angels—around the throne crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Overcome in the presence of holiness, the very foundations of Isaiah’s life were shaken, and he said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” But at that moment, one of the seraphim took a live coal from the altar and touched his lips, purging him from his sin. Then he heard the voice of the

LORD saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah was able to respond, “Here am I; send me” because he had cleared up the issue of his personal identity—he finally knew who he was.

Chapter Three

WE ARE THE OBJECTS OF PERFECT LOVE

In order to answer the question “who am I?” I must first realize that God the Father is perfect in righteousness, perfect in veracity—perfect in His entire being. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are both co-equal with the Father. Together, the Trinity has a divine self-image based upon their essence, their righteousness, their integrity, their perfection. They *like* who they are. They *love* who they are!

One of the hardest things for Christians to understand is that when God says “I love you just the way you are” the emphasis is upon *you*. In other words, you are the object of perfect love.

Perfect love cannot change. Not a single thing can stop its initiation, hinder its quality, or change its value. Even if you die from committing the sin unto physical death, you can’t

change the quality of God's love.

My new self-image begins by saying to God in the quietness of my own heart, "I'm the object of Your love." In order for this to work, each believer must do it individually.

God says, "I love you. The source of My love is Me, the subject. I don't love you because of your value as the object. I love you because you have eternal life—and that *gives* you eternal value. You are My son, you are My daughter. I love you because of your eternal value."

Enter into a New Way of Thinking

As I rehearse God's love for me in my heart, I begin to enter into *cognitive self-confidence*. This means to know something thoroughly by experiencing the knowledge of it. That is how I am able to experience the personal knowledge that God loves *me*.

Cognitive self-confidence produces *cognitive invincibility*, meaning that I know without a doubt that nothing can stop this love. Failure cannot stop it. Even death cannot quench the love of God. Death for the believer is just a door into heaven. Therefore, I can stand firmly on the grounds of faith, regardless of what sight dictates.

In order to experience that level of confidence, I must first enter into *objective motivational love* toward God. This means that I know God first loved me (1 John 4:19), that He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell me and fill me, and that according to Romans 5:5, “hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” So His love in me can finally be expressed toward an object—Jesus Christ.

Then the Holy Spirit fills me with subjective love that comes from God; I become the subject and I can love all of mankind—not because of the value of the object who is to receive that love, but because of my value as the subject who will give that love to a lost or needy soul. I am walking in the Spirit, walking in love (Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 5:2).

In a marriage where the husband is unfaithful to his wife again and again, the woman can choose to stay with her husband, not because of him, but because of what is in her as the subject—the love of God shed abroad by the Holy Spirit.

It’s the same for the husband whose wife goes out on him. By grace he reigns with Jesus Christ over his circumstances, and he enters into

the stewardship of grace, the stewardship of mercy, and the stewardship of love.

One of the greatest things we could ever understand is what Jesus said in John 13:12-17, “Love one another as I love you.” This is not talking about *personal* love, because there isn’t anything in certain people that you can love. You may have a moral love for others based upon your nature as a kind person with a good temperament, but you can’t have *objective* love toward them. The Lord said we are to love others the same way He loves us, and He loved us *while* we were yet sinners. Therefore, our *subjective* love for others is based upon God’s love controlling us.

Finished Work Rehabilitation

How do we maintain this kind of love and end up with cognitive self-esteem? We do it by first receiving the Word of God, then by being filled with the Holy Spirit. As we listen in the Spirit with discipline, we receive the impartation of the Word of God. After that comes application—the work of the Spirit through our faith in the words of Christ.

This is called *epistemological rehabilitation*, receiving the Word of God. As we listen to our

pastor-teacher, study the Word, and worship and praise God with thanksgiving as the gauge of our value system, God rehabilitates us in a grace process.

Now we can finally enter into the mystery of the Church Age as believer-priests. We can have a new self-image because of the New Covenant. We are part of a new “species” in the New Creation: the one new man (Ephesians 2:15). We have a new purpose, and the stability and mobilization of love toward self is magnificent. *I love my self. You love your self.*

What do you love about yourself? God’s grace, love, forgiveness, mercy, and having the Word dwell in you richly. You love yourself because you are loving the New Creation! You’re loving the object of God’s love—*you*. You love yourself and there is nothing wrong with that. It revolutionizes your self-image. It totally transforms you. The Holy Spirit is loving you through *your* faculties.

Now you can recognize projections toward yourself from the air. You recognize reflections from your old sin nature. You discern the people who are around you. And in spite of all these things, you love yourself. How? With the same love by which you love God.

By the grace and love of God, I enter into cognitive invincibility toward myself. I also enter into a New Covenant love toward myself through theantric action, which means the Kingdom of God is now in control of my spirit, soul, and body, and I am now able to love myself. My past is gone forever, “now” just passed by, and the eternal God is my life as I walk in Him from faith to faith and glory to glory. (Do not just read over this paragraph, but *meditate* upon it.)

Loving Others

If my self-image is derived from the New Covenant and New Creation, and I am a new species, how does that help me relate to others? In the same way I have learned to relate to myself: The Holy Spirit sheds love abroad in my heart for them.

I must ask myself, “Do I love others because they are good or because they have been transformed? Even if they are good now, they will fail sometime in the future.

So many people base their relationships on the object. Is the object kind? Is the object good? Is the object my friend? If so, I am his friend. But if I understand Matthew 5:43-46 correctly, I know that even the publicans treat each other on

the basis of conditional love. Those in the world love people that love them. And so often this same thing goes on in the churches of Jesus Christ—conditional love exists although there is the knowledge of how unconditional love should operate.

When our self-image will not allow us to love ourselves properly, then we cannot love others properly. Because you are a Christian, your conscience will not reflect a good self-image unless it reflects *God's* image in you. This is the problem that we see over and over again among precious people. Many believers are mature and live in spiritual adulthood. But more often, Christians have deep problems with self-image.

Chapter Four

DERIVING OUR IDENTITY FROM CHRIST

How many people blame others for disappointments all because they derive their identity from the wrong source? We don't need to have an extension of our ego in a relationship to make us feel secure. We don't need attachments to make us feel peaceful or measures of success to give us a new self-image. Rather, our identity is derived from our death, burial, resurrection, and position of rest in Christ. Our identity is found in the Word of God through the Spirit of the living God.

People have made wrong choices for years because they have never learned how to derive their identity from Christ. They put natural preference, security, and geographical location in place of the Cross. Years are wasted while they wait for a time when everything will be "comfortable," thinking they won't need faith to enter

into the will of God.

They say, “Well maybe next year things will be easier.”

But that’s not the way it is. God wants to reduce us to the place where we need to have faith in Jesus Christ, go to Him in prayer, and derive our identity outside of the security system of self-preference.

In the last days, as believers face the possibility of persecution, we must determine once and for all to have personal identities that are based on Jesus Christ and our obedience to the Word of God. *Our value and our purpose is realized in each thought we think with God.* Only in this way can we have a godly self-esteem in our conscience and a true sense of our eternal value before God.

Our confession now becomes an extension of our thoughts and a reinforcement for our eternal identity. All behavior that comes from our confession is derived from an identity that has been established in the newness of life through a constant renewal of the mind.

*Discovering Our Identity in the Right
Local Assembly*

Divine viewpoint directs our path (Psalm

32:8). But if we choose to live in human viewpoint we will always hesitate to make sure we are secure in our decision to walk on a certain pathway. Therefore, we need to revenge disobedience with immediate obedience and not procrastination. We don't revenge disobedience by waiting for a better season. It was King Agrippa who said, "When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). Some Christians have said, "I will fulfill the will of God in a more convenient season."

The value of my Christianity will be determined by the ministry I'm in, the Word I receive there, and the fruitfulness of that ministry. Choosing to live my life in an extension of my ego just to survive in no-man's land reveals that my identity is self-centered and self-oriented.

For this reason, the Word of God tells us to always seek those things which are above and to abide in the local assembly God chooses for us on earth. This way, we can consistently receive a fresh supply of the substance of the information of categorical doctrine that gives us the mind of Christ.

Listening to a taped message can never compare with being in the presence of God in the Body of Christ during a service. When the Body

hears and receives the Word, every member is worshipping God together. The angels are present, and there is a special unction. But listening to a tape will only provide the speaker's voice without the experience of the fullness of Body life.

Of course, there are rare cases when there is no other option, and booklets and tapes have proven to be extremely uplifting. The precious missionaries who are serving God in every corner of the world as well as people who are isolated by illness and unfortunate circumstances need to be fed and built up continually. We receive so many testimonies to the value of booklets, tapes, and other forms of technology that keep the "lifelines" open.

Vocation vs. Occupation

What did Paul mean when he said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live"? What did he really mean when he said, "Yet not I"? He meant that our purpose and our value system should never be based on attachments, relationships, or success as an extension of ourselves. Our purpose and values should always be based on "yet not I."

We can love and serve God anywhere, but

the geographical will of God is important. An occupation is necessary, but it is important to put our vocation first. Following the call of God in a vocation means putting categorical doctrine ahead of everything else. Our call is most crucial because it is God's divine summons for every Christian to come under categorical doctrine in a local assembly. We must be in the place where doctrine is flourishing; we must be in the place where we can find Body life, in a church that bears fruit *daily*. It means that I have settled the issue of "who I am" and recognize that my true identity is in the fact that God loves me and has a plan for my life.

CONCLUSION

Thousands of believers have missed the whole point of the purpose of our life on earth. Let's learn to discern what it really means to live in God's eternal value system, and derive our eternal identity through identification with the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

The measure that I allow God to love me in every area of my life is the measure that I'm going to love people who don't measure up to my expectations.

We can share the same love with these people, all because we have a divine self-image. As long as it is "not I but Christ," I can have a divine self-image. I know my weaknesses, and I know I have an old sin nature, and I know I'm going to use rebound. Still, I can have a divine self-image because Jesus Christ gives me an exchanged life through the Cross. I only need to make sure I keep receiving the exchanged life

through faith, study, and fellowship with Him.

When my expectation is from God, then I can be released in an eternal identity that declares, “God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Psalm 73:26). Amen!