

Who Accepts Whom?

“Are you a Christian?”

“Of course I am; I accepted Christ a long time ago.”

How often have we heard an exchange similar to this! And if you were the questioner, perhaps you felt a bit uneasy hearing this feather-light response. The problem is not so much that the answer was wrong, as that the responder failed to say more.

Modern methods of evangelism have produced a glut of professing Christians who talk as if becoming a Christian were something of their own doing. It goes something like this: “God has done all He can do, the next move (the really decisive one) is up to you... Heaven or hell—the choice is yours.” By thus “accepting” Christ, man virtually becomes his own savior. Man is in the driver’s seat, and God becomes a mere spectator. Man becomes the sun around which all else in the universe rotates.

Our present day situation was well summarized by Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) when he said,

Sometimes we are inclined to think that a very great portion of modern revivalism has been more a curse than a blessing, because it has led thousands to a kind of peace before they have known their misery; restoring the prodigal to the Father’s house, and never making him say, “Father, I have sinned.” How can he be healed who is not sick? or he be satisfied with the bread of life who is not hungry? The old-fashioned sense of sin is despised, and consequently a religion is run up before the foundations are dug out. Everything in this age is shallow. Deep-sea fishing is almost an extinct business so far as men’s souls are concerned. The consequence is that men leap into religion, and then leap out again. Unhumbled they came to the church, unhumbled they remained in it, and unhumbled they go from it.

You see, the reason so many people fail to express Christianity as they should, is that they have heard a “gospel” that failed to say enough in the first place. Today, many pulpits proclaim a God who is trying, in a largely unsuccessful way, to make Himself acceptable to man. In interests of simplicity, the gospel has been over-reduced to the point of being trivialized. But if a little truth is presented as if it were the whole truth, the result will be confusion at best, and deception at worst. When Satan lured Eve with the original temptation, some of what he said was true. (Compare Gen. 3:5 with 3:7, 22.) Partial truth can be more dangerous than total lies! Let us therefore take a look at the “other half” of the gospel, which we cannot afford to omit.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is essentially God-centered, not man-centered. We were created for His pleasure—not vice versa (Rev. 4:11). But through Adam, sin has entered into the world, and has entirely corrupted the very heart and nature of every man. Thus we are separated from God by an infinite span. God’s holiness and justice demand that our sin be punished. If your sin is not punished, God is no longer holy. And if He is not holy, He is not God at all.

In our state of sin, we are not capable of paying for our sins, changing ourselves, nor making peace

with God. We are unacceptable to Him. *God accepteth no man's person* (Gal. 2:6). If left to our sinful selves, we are all headed for eternal damnation. The immeasurably holy God will justly pour out His righteous wrath upon us. Our only hope is that someone greater than us will do for us what we cannot do, and make us acceptable to God.

But who can fully pay for our sins? Who can live perfectly—without even one sin— to earn God's favor for us? Who can make us acceptable to God? The Biblical answer is unmistakably clear: only God Himself can do all this. And that, my friend, is precisely what He has done! Though under no obligation whatsoever to do so, He has, in grace and mercy alone, out of the goodness of His heart, made sinners acceptable to Himself.

How has God done such an unexpected, amazing thing as this? In the Lord Jesus Christ! And He has done it in such a way that sinners are delivered, and yet justice is maintained. The guilty one goes free, but the standards of justice are not broken. Christ, the eternal Son of God, came into this world and became a man, lived a life of sinless obedience to the Father, and died the death which sinners deserve to die, fully satisfying the demands of the law. In Christ Jesus, sinners are declared to be reconciled, accepted by God. Thus we read, God hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6). In other words, God has made to be the objects of His grace all who are in His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Accepting is God's prerogative, ultimately. Salvation is His act, His initiative, His intervention in a hopeless case. Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9). **Salvation is not so much the sinner accepting God, as it is God accepting the sinner** who, in desperation, turns from sin and clings to Christ. This is the gospel message which exalts God and rightly positions Him in the driver's seat. This makes man the orbiting sphere around God.

In grace, the emphasis is not on the recipient, but on the Giver!

My friend, is this the gospel of your salvation? Are you still thinking in terms of what you have done, or are you depending entirely on what God's Son has done?

I can almost hear someone saying, "But how about my decision? Didn't I have to do something? Didn't I at least have to decide, and desire to be saved?"

I will let Mr. Spurgeon give an answer from his autobiography:

When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron; and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man—that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God. One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "How did you come to be a Christian?" I sought the Lord. "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. "I prayed," thought I, but then I asked myself, "How came I to pray?" I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. "How came I to read the Scriptures?" I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine, I have not departed to

this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, "I ascribe my change wholly to God."

An anonymous hymn-writer put it this way:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true,
No, I was found, was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea;
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,
As Thou, dear Lord, on me, on me.

I find, I walk, I love; but O, the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
For Thou wert long before-hand with my soul;
Always, always Thou lovedst me.

Yes, in conversion I do desire Christ, and I do make a choice; but even all that is His work of grace in me. *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13). So God doesn't save a man against his will; He first makes him willing. Such willingness is not natural to man. It is secured only by God's grace.

Therefore we must not depend on our decision. We must not depend on our depending, nor trust in our trusting, nor look to our looking. We look not to our accepting of Christ, but to Christ Himself.

But is all this really taught in the Bible? Undoubtedly. The whole point of the Old Testament sacrificial system was to (symbolically) make the offerer acceptable to God. We frequently read statements such as this from the Old Testament, *And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him* (Lev. 1:4).

Again the New Testament approach is that it is God who makes believers to be *accepted in the beloved* (Eph. 1:6). God is the One who must be satisfied. The atonement by Christ terminates on God. *He made [Christ the Son] to be sin for us* (2Cor. 5:21).

Likewise, when we look at the word "receive" we are again brought face to face with the reality that it is ultimately God who does the receiving. This the Scriptures often affirm. For example, the psalmist was comforted by knowing *He shall receive me* (Ps. 49:15). The Pharisees complained against Christ that *This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them* (Lk. 15:2). Paul taught the Romans that *Christ also received us to the glory of God* (Rom. 15:7). Hebrews 12:6 states that God is active in adopting spiritual sons into His family: *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*.

In fact, man is opposed to God and His truth unless and until God changes his sinful heart: *A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven* (Jn. 3:27). *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (1Cor. 2:14).

Is there nothing to be said for a repentant sinner receiving Christ? Of course there is. That well-known verse in John 1 which says, *as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name* (v. 12), is a precious truth indeed; yet the next verse states clearly that this receiving of Christ was only possible by the enabling grace of God: *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (v. 13).

My dear friend, the point is simply this: If you love God, it is only because He previously loved you! *We love him, because he first loved us* (1Jn. 4:19). If you chose God, it is only because He previously chose you! *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you* (Jn. 15:16).

Has this humbling truth gripped your soul? Do you see that you are an unworthy sinner whose only way of acceptance with God is that you be found **in Christ**?

Has God accepted you?

Please do not misunderstand me. It is true that you must come to Christ and receive salvation. This good news of Christ Jesus coming into the world to save sinners is truly worthy of all acceptance (1Tim. 1:15). But you must come as a humble beggar, empty-handed, casting yourself upon Christ, marveling in His infinite love. I urge you to come to the Savior of needy sinners at once. Accept Him the way a drowning man accepts a life preserver...the way a beggar accepts alms...the way a prisoner accepts freedom! Receive Him the way a sick man receives the physician!