

Accepted or Acceptable?

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Editor's Note: The following was written by John as part of an informal discussion carried on via e-mail correspondence.

Hi,

It sure looks like our searching friends are down to the fine points that delineate between the gospel of the grace of God and a man-made version which insists on man making some meritorious contribution, even if that contribution is only that of "accepting Christ." How interesting it is that the scriptures base our salvation on our being "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6), while evangelicalism bases it, in the final analysis, on our accepting the beloved (for in the conventional view, the entire "saving work of Christ" will be rendered ineffective by man's rejection of it).

To speak of "accepting" Christ is really semantically dishonoring to the lordship of Christ.

One of the most difficult aspects of the economy of God to understand for folks who have been steeped in the religious mentality is that, in the new covenant, the decision for salvation was God's decision issuing forth in a UNILATERAL covenant. Here I speak of a covenant agreed upon and acted upon by Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Since man was created in the image of God (that is, in Christ, who is the image of the invisible God), the Son's agreement with the Father became man's agreement because being in Christ clearly means that all that is Christ's accrues to those who are in Him. All the promises of God are "Yes" in Christ (II Cor. 1:19-20). When Christ, the eternal Son of God said "Yes," we said, "Yes" in Him. All the promises of God are "Yes" in Christ. When we are sovereignly brought to the place of receiving Christ, we are only confirming what already IS in Christ.

I've often preached that God didn't wait for some godly folks to pray enough so that He could send His Son to earth, and there was no

prayer meeting held to convince God to be willing to sacrifice His Son on the cross, nor was there any contribution on man's part that had anything to do with God raising Christ from the dead.

The carnal mind (how well I know!) perverts all the things of God including the meaning of circumcision. God's covenant with Abraham (and note, it was God's covenant with Abe, not a mutually drawn up agreement between Abe and God) was established BEFORE circumcision and before the giving of the law (Rom. 4:10-11). Clearly we're told in Genesis that circumcision was a SIGN of the covenant (Gen. 17:10; Rom. 4:11). It was not the covenant. It was not the substance of the covenant. It was a sign, A SIGN. Now here's the part that really requires that the Spirit lead one into the truth (John 16:13; I John 2:27).

When one refused circumcision, he disqualified himself; he judged himself unworthy of the unconditional, unilateral covenant, but God did not disqualify him. God did not say, "Oh well, if you don't agree with the counsel of Deity, we'll just scrap the whole thing as far as you're concerned. After all, little man, you're the real boss." The man counted himself unworthy of unconditional favor, but God, coming from unconditional love, does not accept our self-disqualification.

In the gospel, God disqualifies our self-disqualification; God rejects our rejection. God judges our judgment of our selves and says, "No, that is not "acceptable" to me." Much of the teaching of Jesus in the gospels is opened to us when we realize that it is the alien, grace-rejecting persona that God rejects, not the Real man in Christ. For even if we are faithless, that does not make God's faithfulness null and void. All human rebellion is rooted in the lie that God has rejected man. That delusion and the resentment that it causes is the very energy of sin.

Many people miss that truth in regard to the Lord's table. When Paul spoke of worth in regard to partaking of the sign elements, he used the adverb, "unworthily," that is in an unworthy manner. When we disqualify ourselves from the benefits of the body and blood of Christ, we are "eating and drinking unworthILY. We are not discerning the body of Christ as chosen and blameless, with every member of it

having equal worth in the eyes of God. That was the underlying problem among the Corinthians.

In God's dealing with Abraham, he begins on an undeniably unconditional foundation, and builds a relationship entirely thus based. So many miss the fact that from the beginning the issue was "the righteousness of God" at work in Abraham; that is, God acting toward and in Abraham in the integrity of His own love and faithfulness, which bore fruit in Abraham in the form of obedience. Then as God produced faith-obedience in him, He could add to His promises to Abe because He, God, alone, had brought Abraham to a new plane in the relationship, saying "because thou hast.... I will." Abraham had been made ready for a higher level of participation in the work of God.

Those who are dull of heart in discerning the real meaning of scripture read "because thou hast....I will" to mean that, though God established a relationship with Abe unconditionally, later on the relationship came to include conditions of obedience that Abe had to meet. No, No, NO! The story of God's dealing with Abraham is a story of God's righteousness at work, not man's. To whatever heights a man attains spiritually, it is God who has taken Him there. AND, contrary to popular opinion, God doesn't need our permission to get on with His work in our lives.

In dealing with the covenant of promise, Paul makes it clear that faith has to do with the righteousness of God. In Romans 1:17, it is the righteousness of God that is revealed from faith to faith, not the righteousness of men. The reason God reckoned Abraham's faith as righteousness is because that's what his faith was, the righteousness of God, working in Abraham, issuing forth out of Abe and returning to God in the form of faith, in the form of confidence in God, constituted by the righteousness of God.

The faithfulness of God is what constitutes saving faith; that's its very fiber and essence. If God reckons faith as righteousness, you can bet your life that faith really is righteousness, and there is no real righteousness except the righteousness of God. Conventional theology makes a mockery of the expression "Christ-centered." The

popular version of the gospel is not Christo-centric, it is anthropocentric.

We must come to understand that we are acceptable because, and only because, we have been accepted in the Beloved. That very pregnant scriptural phrase conveys the truth that we have, in Christ, the valuation that God places upon His Son; the valuation that perfect love bestows. It (perfect love) does not look for that which, in and of itself, would draw forth to itself love's bestowal; but love, by bestowing itself freely, draws forth from the object of love, a response energized by gratefulness. As love arouses such response, it can bestow itself more and more, bringing forth that which has its further loving approval.

Stay tuned for more serious, seminal, samplings

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