

I'm Going to Quit Trying to be Acceptable

Romans 15:7 says something that totally shocks me. "Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (NASU). It doesn't shock me that we are to accept one another. What shocks me is that Christ has accepted me. I'm shocked because I know me so well. I can hardly imagine that Christ has already accepted me. Yet, that is exactly what Paul says Christ has already done.

For most of my Christian life, I've been trying to prove to God that I am acceptable. I want Him to believe I know enough, have done enough, have cut out enough sin, have followed His pattern enough so that when He puts me in His scales of judgment, He will see I'm acceptable and let me enter heaven. However, I've run into a problem with that. Perhaps you've run into the same problem. No matter how much I do (or don't do) I still see my mistakes, flaws, and sins glaring me in the face. I may fool you, but I know I am completely unacceptable.

But Paul says Jesus has already accepted me (**Romans 15:7**). Paul says the Father has already accepted me (**Romans 14:3**). How can that be? He doesn't accept me because I am so acceptable; He accepts me because He is so accepting.

Of course, He can't just accept me in my sins. God is too holy for that. According to **Habakkuk 1:13**, God cannot look at sin, let alone accept it. How on earth can I be accepted? **Romans 3:23-26** explains that God has justified me by His grace through redemption in Jesus. **Romans 5:6-8** explains that God sent Jesus to die for me while I was still weak, ungodly, and sinful. God has made me acceptable by cleansing me in the blood of Jesus. According to **Romans 8:1**, there is no condemnation for me because I am in Christ Jesus. God doesn't condemn me. Rather, He accepts me.

I can quit trying to be acceptable. I can quit trying to prove to God I am acceptable. I can accept that on my own I am not acceptable and never could be, yet by the grace offered in Jesus I have been made acceptable.

This is all well and good as a theological and soteriological doctrine. But how does this help me today? Where is the comfort and help in this truth? How does this truth work to set me free?

When I am trying to prove myself acceptable, I am focusing on me. I am trying to be good enough, to do good enough. Yet, I fully know I simply am not good enough. That leads me in one of three directions. I either go to disregard, despair, or denial.

I may disregard God and His will entirely. I declare myself acceptable because I determine I don't have to be acceptable. I may do this by disregarding God's existence. If He doesn't exist, I don't have to be acceptable to Him. I may disregard the Bible as His standard. If He hasn't revealed a standard, I don't have to measure up. Or I may develop some kind of universalist approach that says God doesn't care how acceptable I am. I may even try to make this sound biblical by letting it masquerade as God's grace.

However, I may take God and His standard into full account. Wanting to be acceptable to Him, I work hard to keep the standard, to measure up, to be acceptable. But I constantly fall short. That will lead to despair. I throw my hands in the air and simply quit trying. I can't accomplish it, why bother? I'll never be good enough. I believe I need to be acceptable, but am convinced I never will be.

I may turn to denial. I so desperately want to prove myself acceptable and yet am confronted with my own unacceptability that I start to deny those unacceptable parts. I minimize, justify, rationalize. I start to box in God's will and figure out why certain parts don't apply to me. Or, I start to believe that doing well in one area makes up for doing poorly in another. I start to suppress or repress the parts of me I see as unacceptable. I ignore them. This is spiritual stagnation. It is death.

Disregard, despair, and denial will not help me grow to be like Christ. They will not set me free. So, as long as I'm trying to gain acceptance, I will never be acceptable or accepted. However, once I quit trying to attain acceptance and simply see that I am accepted, I can choose a fourth path.

I do not have to disregard God and His will. In fact, why would I want to turn my back on the one power in the universe Who can make me acceptable. Instead, I can surrender to God and His will, knowing that His grace is the power to save me and make me acceptable (**Galatians 2:20; Roman 7:24-25**).

I do not have to turn to despair because I know that my work is not in vain because God has accepted me (cf. **I Corinthians 15:10, 57-58**). I know that God is working in me to will and to work for His good pleasure (**Philippians 2:12-13**). I know that God Himself will work everything together for good in my life (**Romans 8:28**). Sure, I've messed up and sinned again, but God is working to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish me (**I Peter 5:10**). I have no need to despair because my growth isn't based on me; it is based on God and I can walk by faith in Him to grow me.

I do not have to turn to denial. I don't have to try to hide things from anyone, including God. I no longer have to try to hide things from myself. If God has accepted me, I can accept me. I can ask God to search out my heart and see all the grievous ways in me (**Psalm 139:23-24**). I can ask God to show them to me. I don't have to be afraid of them. Rather, I can examine them in the light of God's grace and Word and grow out of them.

Through God's grace, sacrifice, and acceptance I can avoid the paths of disregard, despair, and denial that lead to death (**Romans 6:23**). Instead, I can pursue the path of my true destiny in Christ. I can pursue the path of discipleship. I can pursue a path of growth in Christ. I can grow in every aspect of my life because I can look head-on at every shortcoming, every character flaw, every grievous path. I can see them for the sin that they are without fear. I can learn by God's Word and the wise counselors He places in my life how to address those weaknesses and grow past them. As I do that, I will become more and more like Christ.

So, I'm going to quit trying to be acceptable. Rather, I'm going to revel in Christ's acceptance. I'm going to accept me. I'm going to let Christ work on me to grow me to be more like Him.

-Edwin L. Crozier