




# Acceptance



## Desiring Acceptance

1. Most people desire acceptance.<sup>1</sup> Where do people look for acceptance?<sup>2</sup> What kind of acceptance do they want?
2. In what ways do people try to gain acceptance? What problems do they face?

## Acceptance from God

- ❑ Jesus often spent time with “unacceptable people” – that is, “tax collectors<sup>3</sup> and sinners.”<sup>4</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law complained about this (*Luke 5:29-30*). On one occasion, they muttered, “This man (Jesus) welcomes sinners and eats with them” (*15:2b*).
  - ❑ In response, Jesus told three parables (*Luke 15:3-32*). Read *Luke 15:11-32* (the 3<sup>rd</sup> parable).
    3. What is the basis of the younger son’s acceptance by his father? Why is the younger son accepted by his father?
    4. What does the older son think about his brother’s acceptance? What does the older son think is necessary to be accepted?
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- ❑ God’s acceptance of us is not based on our performance. It is based on His mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness. God’s holy standard is too high for fallen humans to achieve. Only Jesus Christ has met this holy standard. God’s acceptance of us occurs only “in Christ”.
  - ❑ We are united with Christ through faith. We must confess our own unworthiness and need, repent (turn away from sin and toward God), and entrust our lives to the crucified and risen Christ. As we are united with Christ through faith, we are welcomed into God’s family.
    - 📖 “...since we have been justified<sup>5</sup> through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Romans 5:1, NIV*).
    - 📖 “Yet to all who did receive [Jesus Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (*John 1:12, NIV*).
  - ❑ If a believer feels unaccepted by God, it may be because of weak faith, a sense of shame or guilt, or unconfessed sin. But God stands ready to receive his repentant children.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘acceptance’ means that a person or act is received with approval or welcomed by another. As we consider the subject of acceptance, we may also think in terms of ‘face’ – one’s perceived value or status in social contexts.

<sup>2</sup> People seek acceptance in various settings – family, friends, community, society, academy, workplace, field of work or study, social group, religious group, etc. Some people speak of ‘self-acceptance’ – the accepting of oneself.

<sup>3</sup> ‘tax collectors’ were disliked because they were agents of the oppressive Roman government, and often dishonest.

<sup>4</sup> If ‘sinner’ is defined as ‘one who sins’ (i.e., one who thinks or does anything opposed to God), everyone is a sinner (*Romans 3:12; 1 John 1:8*). However, the Bible usually uses ‘sinner’ with reference to one’s identity – as one who dishonors God through unbelief or willing opposition. In *Luke 15:2*, the ‘sinners’ are viewed from the perspective of the self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law. However, they fail to see that they also may be ‘sinners.’

<sup>5</sup> ‘justified’ (*dikaiōthentes*) – God’s act of declaring a sinful person righteous (that is, right with God) based on the righteousness of Christ. This is a gift of God’s grace, and is received through faith in Jesus Christ (*Romans 3:22-24*).

<sup>6</sup> Satan (the accuser) wants believers to feel unaccepted by God, but we must not believe Satan’s lies. Concerning sin, let us remember, ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...’ (*1 John 1:9*).

### *Acceptance → Complacency?*

- ❑ Since the most important acceptance is acceptance from God, and we receive God's acceptance through faith, *not* by our own efforts or performance, does God's acceptance lead to complacency?<sup>7</sup> The apostle Paul spoke about being content in his circumstances and material provision,<sup>8</sup> but he was not complacent! (See *Philippians 3:10-16*.)<sup>9</sup>

### *Acceptance → New Life & Purpose*

- ❑ We cannot earn God's acceptance by our works, but once accepted by God's grace through faith, God has work for us to do! (See *Ephesians 2:8-10*.)
- ❑ God's children are to live holy and godly lives; loving God and others, growing in Christ-like character, and doing good. The Bible is full of such instructions.



### *Acceptance in this World*

- ❑ Though secure in God's acceptance, believers can still struggle with acceptance in this world. It is unrealistic to expect acceptance from everyone.<sup>10</sup> In fact, believers should expect some unacceptance (or rejection) because of their faith.<sup>11</sup> Still, acceptance from others is desired.
  - ❑ Believers want acceptance in important relationships (e.g., family and close friends). They want acceptance in their church groups and workplaces. Students and workers want their work to be accepted by their professors and bosses. In this world, believers are instructed...
    - 📖 “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (*Romans 12:17b-18, NIV*).
    - 📖 [Concerning work] “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (*Colossians 3:23, 24b, NIV84*).<sup>12</sup>
5. Consider questions 1 and 2 again. How does this lesson bring biblical perspective to the subject of acceptance? What difference does it make in our struggles with acceptance?<sup>13</sup>

### *Reflection/Application*

- Are you struggling with acceptance? Have you received God's acceptance through faith in Christ? If you are a believer who is struggling with acceptance, are you *experiencing* God's acceptance? If not, attempt to find out why. Review this lesson, and seek God's help. If you need encouragement or help, talk to a trusted, mature Christian friend or counselor.

<sup>7</sup> ‘complacency’ – feeling of satisfaction with oneself or one's achievements, lacking desire for improvement.

<sup>8</sup> See *Philippians 4:10-12* and *1 Timothy 6:6-10*. Also see *Hebrews 13:5-6*.

<sup>9</sup> Paul wrote, ‘Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me’ (*Phil. 3:12, NIV*). ‘all this’ refers to Paul's greatest ambition – to know Christ fully, and to realize complete Christ-likeness (*3:10-12*). This should be the greatest ambition of every Christian. We should seek these things in our present life, though the full realization is future, at the end of this age.

<sup>10</sup> Sometimes it's impossible to please both God and people. Paul once wrote, ‘Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? ...If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. (*Gal. 1:10*).

<sup>11</sup> Jesus said ‘the world’ hated him, and also hates his followers (*John 15:18-19*). In this context, ‘the world’ refers to the fallen created order that is opposed to God in its beliefs, values, allegiances, morals, attitudes and behaviors.

<sup>12</sup> These instructions were originally given to slaves (in one kind of boss/worker relationship); thus the instructions are appropriately applied to workers in general. Actually, the basic principles can be applied to various activities.

<sup>13</sup> If Christ is at the center of our lives, we will experience the most important acceptance – God's acceptance, and we will keep everything else in proper perspective. We will not seek acceptance in wrong places, or for wrong reasons, or by wrong methods. When we attempt to gain the approval of others, like our bosses, we will work ‘as working for the Lord’, wanting to do our work well, for God's glory. If we ‘fail’ to gain the acceptance of others, we will be encouraged by the fact that we are secure in God's acceptance. His love is constant, and He is in control.