

Acceptable and Accepted

"These are the days when men of all social disciplines and all political faiths seek the comfortable and the accepted."

J. K. Galbraith.

In today's politically correct society many people look for the soft option. They don't want to rock the boat so they seek what is comfortable and acceptable to their peers. This attitude is both negative and unproductive. One of the most basic human needs is *the need to be accepted*, and consequently, "seeking acceptance" has many outward appearances. It's one of the first things a child desires from it's parents. *"Acceptance is what we wish for ourselves and often deny others."* When we constantly deny others "approval" we create rejection. Rejection in turn produces very mixed-up and dysfunctional people. The *longing for belonging* must be satisfied in every individual.

Many of you may find it meaningful and necessary to obtain favour from others, to become accepted by others, receive the approval of others, or to simply please others. In itself, all of this is not unwholesome or detrimental to you, as we all have a genuine need to get on with those around us. However, should this become the main focus of life, and then the tension it creates will have a very negative effect on you. You cannot live your life purely to please others, and besides, *people pleasers* are quite pitiful as they have no self-esteem. Someone once said, *"I began to understand that self-esteem isn't everything' it's just that there's nothing without it."*

The other side of the coin however, is an individual's passion to please *himself*, and in so doing, he displays no regard for those around him. Lisa Edmondson said this, *"A talented trumpeter who toots his own horn winds up playing to an empty theatre."* Being totally *self-centred* is just as destructive to oneself, and to those around you, as being a people pleaser. Therefore, which ever way the desire to please may be directed, it has the potential to become very harmful. You cannot place "you" at the centre of life. So what can you do to keep a healthy balance in this area?

The first thing to do is to realise that unless you are accepted by your heavenly Father nothing else in life will satisfy you. In **2 Corinthians 6:2** the apostle Paul declares, **"Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** A literal translation (from the original Greek) reads, *"See, right now is the appointed time to be well-accepted; right now is the day of salvation."* What's very interesting to note is that the word translated **"acceptable"** is made up of two Greek words - *"pros"* which means *"over and above"* and *"thektos"* which means *"to be regarded favourably."* Therefore, **"now is the acceptable time"** implies that *"now is the appointed time to be regarded favourably (over and above)."*

Once you receive salvation you enter into the appointed time, a time where you are *regarded favourably* by God. But this favour, or acceptance, is so great that it is *"over and above"* any favour that you can attain here on earth. Why? Simply because it is the same favour [or acceptance] that the Son has with the Father. You have obtained the very same position that Jesus has with His Father; therefore, you are totally acceptable in His sight. What's more, this position is not issued out of merit or achievement as it is inseparably linked to God's grace.

2 Timothy 1:9 states, **"Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before**

time began." Divine purpose and grace were pre-destined to bring you favour and make you acceptable to God.

When preaching to Cornelius' household in **Acts 10:34, 35** Peter said, ***"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. In every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is fully accepted by Him."***

The fact that God never shows any partiality means that He desires for everyone, regardless of their nationality or ethnic orientation, to hear the Gospel and be saved. In Jesus Christ there are no barriers, therefore, God's unconditional love and abounding grace are available for all of mankind, and can be received by anyone and everyone.

Man has become very good at building class structures and creating barriers between ethnic groups, and in so doing, he effectively removes the other person's dignity. When dying from aids, Arthur Ashe was asked how painful it had been to suffer rejection through the stigma of being HIV positive, and on his death bed he was heard to answer, *"The greatest rejection I have suffered was still because of the colour of my skin."* It's hard to believe that a dying man would consider the suffering experienced through rejection and prejudice because he was black, to be far greater than the suffering experienced through having a socially unacceptable disease like aids.

When we take away a man's dignity we affect him so deeply that it may change his attitude to life permanently. This is why it is critical that we preach the Gospel to the downtrodden and rejected. Salvation brings all nations into the *appointed time* a time when God's love and grace are freely bestowed upon every one who believes a time when we are all well-accepted and receive great favour from God. And this spiritual principle is defined clearly in **Ephesians 1:5,6** - ***"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will; to the praise of the glory of His grace; by which He has made us accepted*** (objects of His grace) ***in the Beloved."*** You are fully accepted in the Beloved!

From the beginning of time God had a detailed plan for each of His children. By faith, He looked down the corridors of time and saw us all saved. And He did this ***"according to the good pleasure of His will."*** In modern English we would say, *"...purely because He wanted to."* There was no one else there to entice Him or twist His arm! God did it because of His great love for you and I. What motivates God most is His divine grace and loving kindness, which is in essence His very nature. And divine grace is completely reliant on what God "is" and not who we are. Therefore, He constantly blesses us according to His merits and not ours. Doesn't this astound you?

There is no other place of true acceptance apart from God's Son Jesus. And there is no appointed time, in which God's great favour may manifest, outside of salvation. This is what God has predestined and foreordained for mankind. Acceptance by God, and favour with God, restores man's true sense of self-worth. And in turn, gives him back his dignity. In yourselves, you can never be fully accepted by God. No matter how many good works or good deeds you have performed, a sense of guilt and condemnation will remain. This is because the only place of total acceptance with God the Father is IN HIS SON!

However, if you choose to continue to seek man's approval, or man's acceptance, you shall eventually find yourself stripped of all self-worth and dignity. No man or woman can live up to the total expectations of those around them. And even if you could, are you then able to live up to your own expectations? Trying to find self-worth and dignity by pleasing the desires of others is fruitless, and in the long term, very damaging

to your own character. By becoming the most righteous, the most popular, the most successful, the most professional, or the most wealthy, does not assure you of fulfilling your destiny. Nor does it satisfy the strongest desire of the heart - to *belong*. The only place to be truly acceptable and be totally accepted is in Christ. It's the only location where you can find and develop genuine self-worth and human dignity - ***"In Him we live and move and have our being" [Acts 17:28].***

Many of the Old Testament saints constantly cried out, ***"Let me find favour*** (let me be acceptable) ***in the sight of my Lord."*** Understanding the special privileges you have in Christ helps to create in you a true sense of self-worth, and it develops a beneficial dependence on Him. Also, understanding God's unmerited favour (grace) breeds a healthy acceptance of who you are - based on the knowledge that He has already accepted you as you are!

Remember, in God's household you are good and *acceptable* in His sight. And you've been fully *accepted* in His family. No matter what happened to cause you to see yourself differently, the truth is, in God's eyes to are valuable and precious! And always will be!

It doesn't matter how many times you've been downtrodden, crumpled or tainted with dirt you are never worthless. When life's circumstances have overpowered you, or you've made bad decisions; and even when you've tainted yourself with sin, you do not lose your value in God's eyes. To Him, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless!