

“Accepting” Jesus, or “Becoming Acceptable” to Jesus?

We've heard for years about the importance of “accepting Jesus.” And indeed, the New Testament teaches that there are some things about Him we must accept. We must accept, for instance, that He was/is the Son of God, “...if you knew Me, you would know My Father also....for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.” (John 8:19,24). We must also accept that He was born as “Jesus the Nazarene,” God-incarnate (God in *human* form), Acts 2:22. Additionally, we must accept that He was crucified for our sins but triumphantly raised “both Lord and Christ” from the grave on the third day, Acts 2:32,36. If these things are what is meant by “accepting Jesus,” then I agree that such is certainly required in order to be saved. But, if we think that this is all there is to “accepting Him,” then I must disagree. There is a simple reason for my disagreement: such is not all that the New Testament has to say on the matter. Let me show you.

Just about everyone who desires some level of acceptability with God knows John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” While this great passage has become the proof text for “accepting Jesus,” is that all He had to say on the matter? In the same chapter (John 3:36) Jesus also said, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” It sure sounds like that there is more to this matter of salvation than just “accepting” the facts of who and what Jesus was and is. James 2:24 makes the matter even clearer when it reads, “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” I’m admittedly no Einstein, but apparently **our “accepting Jesus” doesn’t mean that Jesus necessarily accepts us!** “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless.” These are not my words, they come from James 2:19-20, and thus are the inspired words of God through James.

So, if salvation is not just about “accepting Jesus,” but also includes becoming “acceptable to Jesus,” **how do we get to that point of acceptability?** There are many passages that could be used, but notice carefully Titus 2:11-14, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” This passage has several salient points to the issue at hand.

- Salvation is certainly by the “**grace of God**”- it would be foolish and wrong to assume or assert otherwise, cf. Ephesians 2:8-9.
- Salvation has been “**brought to all men**”- that is, the *opportunity* to be saved is available to everyone. Yet we also know that **not all will be saved**- Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.”
- So, if salvation is *by grace*, and is also available to *all men*, but *not everyone* will be saved, **what determines who is lost and who is saved?** Think about the next question carefully, and refer back to Titus 2:12.
- In what **form** did *salvation by God’s grace* appear to mankind? The first word of v.12 is “**instructing**”- God’s gracious provision of salvation appeared to mankind in the form of **instructions!** The rest of vv.12-14 include the instructions for what one needs to do to **become acceptable to Jesus**, and therefore capable of receiving His redemption.

Thus, **those who follow the instructions given by God receive His gracious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ.** That means they become “acceptable to Him” through **obedience.** And those who refuse to heed the instructions, well, 2Thessalonians 2:8-9 says, in part, that God will deal out “*retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction....*” So, the choice is obviously ours. We can “**become acceptable**” to Jesus **through obedient faith, or suffer the consequences.** Sounds like a pretty simple choice to me! Have you become “acceptable” to Jesus through obedience to His will? If not, will you become “acceptable” to Jesus by obeying His will? (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mpcstrong@hotmail.com)