

# ACCEPTANCE

By C.A. Coates

**It is the privilege of every believer to be consciously in the favor of God – to be in the unclouded light and joy of *acceptance*. But, alas! Many who are truly converted are not in the enjoyment of this privilege. It may be helpful to consider briefly *why* not.**

**The things which hinder converted persons from having the light and joy of acceptance may be classed under the four following heads:**

**1. Self-righteousness**

**2. Self-improvement**

**3. Self-gratification**

**4. Self-occupation**

## 1. SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

When I speak of *self-righteousness* I do not mean the proud self-righteousness of the unconverted man. I refer to a very different form of self-righteousness, which leads many to doubt their acceptance with God *because of the imperfections that they find in themselves*. You may say, “But *should* I not have misgivings when I find my spirit and the state of my mind so contrary to that which becomes a Christian? and when I am conscious of inconsistencies and back-slidings?” That you ought to judge yourself, and be humbled before God about these things, is most true; but it is in no way true that your righteousness and acceptance with God depend upon yourself, or are measured by your condition or conduct. To have such a thought in your mind is really to suppose that you could be worthy of God’s favor by something in yourself. It is simply *self-righteousness*.

Then people reason in this way: “Surely if I were converted I should be very different. There must be a great change in one who is born again. And if I had the Spirit of God He would help me gain the victory over evil habits – over the lusts and temptations of the flesh – and to become pleasing to God. But instead of victories, more temptations seem to come my way than ever before, and the evil tendencies of my heart seem to have acquired greater strength. I never felt utterly unworthy of God’s favor and acceptance.” It is not always easy to see that self-righteousness is hidden under all this, yet such is the case. There is the thought that, either by our own efforts, or by God’s grace and the help of His Spirit, we should become *ourselves* suitable to God’s favor; and we are disappointed and distressed to find that we make so little progress in this direction.

It is important to know that the effect of the new birth, and of the grace of God, is not to bring about some change in us on which we could rest, but to convince us of the *impossibility* of finding righteousness, or acceptance with God, in ourselves. An unconverted man may think himself worthy of God’s favor, but every converted person is made conscious of utter unfitness in himself for that favor. The awakened soul gives account of itself in such language as, “I have sinned”; “I am undone”; “I am vile”; “I abhor myself.” Indeed it is a common thing for such people to suppose that since they turned to God the evil tendencies of their hearts had increased rather than otherwise. The fact is that before conversion we went with the stream, and not a ripple impeded our progress; when, by grace, we made some stand *against* the current, we began to feel its force, and to be distressed by it, as never before.

Now I would like to bring two circles before the consideration of your hearts – a circle of darkness and a circle of light – each having for its center the Lord Jesus. The thought of the first circle is presented to us in a solemn way by the words, “Jesus our Lord...who was delivered for our offences,” (Rom.4:25). Here we are brought to view a circle filled with everything that was due to us. Our sins, with all their righteous consequences, are found there; the holy judgment of God is there; death is there. Everything that is attached to us in our responsibility as creatures of Adam’s race was taken account of at Calvary. And we see Jesus our Lord – the Holy One of God – in the midst of that circle of darkness, having taken upon Himself by the will of God to remove everything that made us liable to divine judgment. He was “delivered for our offences,” and He has removed everything that was the outcome and the proof of our lost and guilty state as children of Adam by bearing its full judgment. None could do it but Him, and He has done it in love, that He might bring divine love to us. Well may we adore His sacred name forever.

Thank God! The darkness of the cross is forever past, and now as we look there we see glory and *love*. We see *the glory of God* there; all that He is in majesty, truth, and holiness, as against sin, is fully declared there; and yet there is the most blessed manifestation of His *love*. Where sin seemed to prevail the glory of redemption is shed. Now a new scene opens, as we read, “And was raised again for our justification.” An Old Testament saint may stand on a mountaintop. And seeing the landscape blotted out as a dense cloud from the sea rolled over it, might think of the words, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins” (Isa.44:22). As He looked into the distances of space he would be reminded, “as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). He could hardly catch a glimpse of the gleaming snows of Lebanon without thinking of Isaiah 1:18 or Psalm 51:7. But for the believer all these material figures now give place to a living Person – a Person in spotless suitability to that new world which He has entered as raised from the dead. Jesus our Lord has been “raised again for our justification.” The believer is cleared before God of everything that attached to him in his ruined responsibility in this world, and he is cleared in his relationship with another world, for a *Risen Savior* is the measure of his justification – *Christ Risen* is his righteousness. The apprehension of this by faith gives peace with God, for we read, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom.5:1).

A further blessing is brought before us by the words, “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace (favor) wherein we stand” (Rom.5:2). No believer would question the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ as the Risen Man is in unclouded favor with God. If He was the center of a circle of darkness upon the cross, He is now the center of a circle of light.

### A Circle of Light

How rightly and gloriously does all the light of God’s favor shine upon *Him!* It could not be otherwise. The Son of God – the Glorifier of God – the One who by Himself purged our sins – is unquestionably in the cloudless light of God’s favor. Let the believer’s heart take in this blessed fact in all its reality and greatness, and then let him be divinely assured that he is entitled to stand in the same favor. A place in that circle of light has been secured by divine

grace, and in divine righteousness, for every believer. And it is “by faith” that we appropriate our place in that circle of light, and have “access” into this favor.

Allow me to use a very simple illustration. I was lately in an old English city, and I observed that the principal streets were marked out in squares, and on every square a name was written with large white letters. I asked the meaning of this, and I was told that a fair was to be held shortly in the streets of the city, and that persons had paid for the right to stand during the fair in the square spaces on which their names were written. Now it is a blessed thing to know that Christ has secured for us a standing in that circle of light and favor where He is. To use my illustration, there is a place in that circle of light on which, dear fellow-believer, your name is written. You are entitled to stand there, but it may be that you have never by faith *occupied your standing*. I feel sure that the men whose names I saw written on the ground were not content to know that they had right and title to a standing in the fair. I think I am safe in saying that everyone would be careful to *appropriate* and *occupy* his standing. It is a wonderful moment for the soul when by faith we appropriate and occupy our standing in the favor of God – when we know that we are received and accepted by God through Christ. We do not then think of ourselves, or of our worthiness at all. We think of Christ – His perfections, His suitability to divine favor, His infinite acceptance with God – and by faith, we have access into the favor of which He so worthy.

## 2. SELF-IMPROVEMENT

A second hindrance is that many have given up the thought of *self-improvement*, and this effectively robs them of the joys of acceptance. They know that Christ is their righteousness, and they wish to answer to the amazing grace which has come to them; but they cannot bring themselves up to their ideal of what a Christian ought to be. Hence a painful sense of defect is generally present with them; they are self-condemned in so many points that their enjoyment of divine favor is much clouded.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not saying one word against having a high standard before the soul of what a Christian is and ought to be. I would rather earnestly desire to see in the minds of young believers, and of Christians generally, a much more elevated ideal than is commonly cherished. The believer should not allow himself for a moment to accept a lower standard than the full height of Christianity according to God, as we may learn it in the scriptures. Nor do I say one word against holy self-judgment. I would seek in every way to cultivate divine sensitivity of conscience – the spiritual ability to recognize and judge whatever is contrary to divine light and love in us.

But *self-disappointment* is a very different thing from *self-judgment*. Indeed, if there were true self-judgment there would never be self-disappointment. If in honesty and sobriety of soul I have judged "that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing," I shall certainly not *expect* anything from myself, and it has been well said that where there is no expectation there can be no disappointment. But I feel sure that many young believers, and I dare say some old ones too, are very familiar with the wretched and depressing experience which I have spoken of as *self-disappointment*. They have made many fresh starts; they have often been stirred up, and have made up their minds to be more for Christ; they have thought, "I shall do better now; I am more earnest about it than I was before"; but it has all ended in disappointment. They have no idea that they are trying to improve themselves. They would repudiate such a thought. They suppose that they know better than to look for good in themselves; and yet their disappointment is the plain proof that, in spite of all their knowledge of scripture, they have expected to make themselves different, for they are disappointed because they have not succeeded in doing so.

Let me use another simple illustration. Suppose your neighbor had a heap of rubbish in his garden, and you saw him turning it over very diligently every day, and constantly coming away looking very crestfallen and disappointed. You would be sure that he had expected to find something that was worth the search. One day you ask him over the hedge if there is anything valuable in the heap of stuff he has got there. "Oh no," he says; "It is only rubbish, of no value to me or anybody else." But the next day you see him turning it over again, and looking as disappointed as ever, and this occurs day after day for weeks. You would think, "Whatever that man says, it is evident he has not given up the expectation of finding something there."

Many believers are like this. They say there is no good in themselves, and that they do not expect to find any. Nevertheless, they suffer a good deal of *self-disappointment* from time to time, and this proves that they have not really given up the thought of *self-improvement*. It is strange that we should be so foolish, in the light of scripture, and after all the experience we have had.

Let me carry the illustration a little further. One day you see your neighbor applying a lighted match to the heap of rubbish, and then standing by until the whole is consumed to ashes. You stroll down the garden and make some remark about it. He says, "I can see now what a fool I have been in wasting so much time over this rubbish-heap. The owner of the garden knew all about it, and he told me it was nothing but rubbish, and I proved it to be so every time I turned it over. And yet I must have had an idea there was something good in it, because I was so disappointed to find nothing but rubbish. Now I am glad it is all burned, and I shall waste no more time over it." You can see now that he not only says it is rubbish, but he has *really judged it to be* such, and has given it up as perfectly worthless. God has judged the flesh absolutely in the death of Christ. "Our old man has been crucified with Him." Before God

our whole condition and state in Adam has come under judgment and is done with. The heap of rubbish is burned; it is cleared away absolutely for God. But there is a need that we should reach the same conclusion as God in our souls – that we should realize the necessity for the complete removal of everything that we are in the flesh – and that we should rejoice to be clear of it by the death of Christ. If I live to God it is as one completely sanctified by the death of Christ, as entirely clear of everything that the Christian can speak of as his “old man.” If I am drawn into the company of Christ it is as one who lives because He lives, as one associated with Him in life. I take account of myself as being “alive unto God in Christ Jesus.” It is thus I am in conscious suitability to divine light and love. I am in spirit apart from all the imperfection that attaches to me in Adam. I do not look for, or desire, any improvement of *that* state; I recognize it as a thing wholly condemned.

On the other hand, my heart is attracted by the perfections and blessedness of that new state in which *Man* is found absolutely suitable to all the thoughts and love of God. This is a state in which only ONE MAN is actually found. The Spirit of God delights to make *that Man* attractive to us, to lead our hearts into the immeasurable satisfaction and good pleasure which God has found in Him. Thus, the Spirit forms in our affections an appreciation of that life in which God really exists. It is perfectly revealed in Christ Jesus; our souls learn it adoringly in Him, and thus learning it we are formed in it. I believe if we are responsive to the Spirit of God He will confirm us in utter and unreserved *self-judgment*, but He will lead our hearts into the blessedness of that which is infinitely acceptable to God, as it is found in completeness and perfection in Christ Jesus. And He will lead us into this, not as an unattainable ideal, but as *that in which we live to God*. He is the “Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” and He would form us in the knowledge and appreciation of that which alone is life to God, as set forth in Him, that we might be consciously “in Christ Jesus.” Our old state in Adam is only for us, as it is for God, a condemned thing, and we live to God as “in Christ Jesus,” and as spiritually formed in the appreciation of that new state of perfection and of suitability to God’s good pleasure which is so gloriously set forth in Him.

I do not say that we fully learn what it is to be “in Christ Jesus” in a moment, but there is a moment when we first take account of ourselves as being alive unto God in Him. There may be growth and enlargement in our apprehension of the character and blessedness of that new state in which man is found eternally to God’s good pleasure. But it is an immense gain to be on *that line* with God, and thus to be delivered from the thought of *self-improvement*.

### 3. SELF-GRATIFICATION

I believe the third section of my subject brings us face to face with the true reason why many know so little of the joy and liberty of acceptance. I speak to you, as one who has often

had to learn by sad experience that self-gratification is a deadly foe of the soul's prosperity. May God hold our consciences in His own presence as we speak of it.

I would like to read two scriptures that have very pointed reference to this matter. "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal.5:24). "Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin; that he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Pet.4:1,2).

To *crucify* a man is certainly not to *gratify* him. I suppose every converted person would admit that the flesh is a condemned thing in the sight of God. But if so, it cannot be otherwise than a condemned thing for the Christian. "They that are Christ's" have reached the same judgment of the flesh as God has. It is characteristic of the Christian that he "has crucified the flesh." The Christian is in heart and conscience on that ground – that the flesh is a thing not to be allowed or gratified in any way. And if he is not true to the ground he has taken *his conscience and his heart condemn him*. He cannot make provision for the flesh, or gratify it in any way, without bringing a cloud over the joy of his acceptance.

Indeed, a certain degree of departure in heart must always *precede* self-gratification. It was at a time of "famine in the land" that "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there." It is when, from some unjudged cause, we are not opening our mouths wide and having them filled by the Lord, when we are not fed "with the finest of wheat" and satisfied "with honey out of the rock," that we are in danger of turning from the Lord, and being given up to our own heart's lusts, and to walk in our own counsels (see Psa.81). Beloved brethren, let us watch the *beginnings* of decline, let us make haste to judge the spiritual sloth, the self-confidence, the inward departure from our first love that sneak almost imperceptibly over our hearts, and prepare us to admit suggestions of self-gratification which would otherwise never approach us.

God graciously furnishes us with many safeguards. I often think of that verse, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom.13:14). The very fact that we have to make provision before we can "fulfill the lusts" of the flesh is a mercy. It gives us time to take the alarm, and God does not fail to warn us by smitings of heart and conscience. The things that hinder and damage you most are things for which you have to make provision.

The great thing is to meet every proposal of self-gratification *armed with the mind to suffer in the flesh*. Sin is the *gratification* of the flesh, but "he that has *suffered* in the flesh has ceased from sin." If you allow yourself to entertain a suggestion of self-gratification – if you consider it, and give it a place in your mind – you are done for. You have laid aside your armor, and will fall an easy prey to the foe. But there will be no response to the suggestion or temptation if you stand armed with the mind to *suffer* in the flesh. That which is proposed to

you is exactly opposite to what you are set for. It is suggested that you should be *pleased and gratified* in that very thing in which you are fully minded to *suffer*. You are now in conflict with sin – not going along with it; you suffer in the flesh, and have “ceased from sin.” You no longer live the rest of your “time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

#### 4. SELF-OCCUPATION

I must now say a little about the fourth hindrance to which I alluded, self-occupation. I am sure that this underlies the hindrances that we have already looked at, but there are forms of self-occupation which perhaps hardly fall under the three previous heads, and yet are a withering blight upon the joy of acceptance. There are four kinds of self-occupation.

##### 1. *Self-occupation As to Soul Experience*

A beloved servant, now with the Lord, used to say that he never knew souls much occupied with experience – whether that of Romans 7, Galatians 5, or holiness by faith – that it did not end in making *self* a great object of consideration. Some minds are always attracted by what is experimental. They do not know deliverance, and experimental truths seem to offer what they are seeking. They are not seeking an increased knowledge of *the grace of God*, or deepened acquaintance with *Christ*; their object of desire is to have a more satisfactory experience. That is, self is still their center. And such souls are constantly occupied either in bemoaning how little they have attained, or in complacently assuming that they have reached a certain stage of experience. It has often been remarked that in the writings of those that advocate “holiness by faith” the beauty and perfection of what Christ is in Himself as an all-blessed Object for the heart is very little presented. Christ is set forth as *One who can bring about a new experience* in the believer, and it is easy to see that the new experience has often a more prominent place in the mind than Christ.

The remedy for all this is to have *the purpose of God* distinctly in view, and His purpose is to have us before Him “as sons with Him who is above.” It is God’s pleasure that we should “receive the adoption of sons” – that is, receive the place of sonship as a gift. This is no question of human effort, experience, or attainment. But it is God’s glorious purpose of divine love, and it infinitely transcends every conception of blessing that could be formed in our minds. No standard of experience, however exalted, and no goal of attainment, however advanced, which we could propose to ourselves could possibly come up to *sonship*. Whatever your ideal may be, the purpose of God eclipses it. Your standard of perfection dims and fades before the glorious light of the divine purpose. Indeed, there is but one Person in whom you could learn the exceeding greatness and blessedness of your place according to the love and purpose of God, and that is the Son of God. God has predestinated us to be “conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom.8:29). We are “sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ,” and “because we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal.3:26; 4:6).

You will find when souls are occupied with experience – whether it be in connection with holiness, power for service, or spiritual attainment – that they always have something before them less than the purpose of God. They are either pursuing, or are satisfied with, something less than that which divine loves purposes, and thus they are losers to an incalculable extent. It is when the purpose of God in its greatness is before our hearts, and we are mightily attracted by it, that our experience becomes like that of the beloved servant who could say, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I might apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14). This is Christian experience – the experience of a man who was not thinking of his experience, but of the exceeding greatness of *the purpose of God*.

## ***2. Self-occupation in Service***

It is a sad thing when *service* interferes with *soul prosperity*. Service may take possession of the heart until it becomes the theme of conversation, the subject-matter of correspondence, and the center around which the thoughts continually revolve. It is possible to be so engrossed with service that one’s meditations are colored by it, one’s prayers are full of it, and the word of God becomes simply a quarry out of which material for sermons and addresses can be dug. This is a serious loss to the soul, and many are thereby hindered from making spiritual progress. Very often young believers who have not even peace with God are encouraged to take up service, and they become so occupied with what they are doing that they are not at leisure to learn or to take their place in the favor of God. Hence, so long as their service prospers, and they get on pretty well with it, they are happy. *The service is their life*. But when there is no success, and the whole thing seems to be a failure, their joy collapses; and they discover how little they really have, and in many cases find that they are perfect strangers to the liberty and joy of acceptance.

I feel sure that it is a much greater thing to God that we should be in the enjoyment of peace with Him, in the light of His favor, and in the acceptance of sonship, than that we should be preaching, teaching, or giving away tracts. I do not undervalue service, and I thank God for every true servant, but I am sure that *the first thing in the mind of God is to bring us to Himself* – into the enjoyment of His favor, which is better than life – into the real liberty and satisfaction of *heart in divine love* which is connected with acceptance. Anything which occupies us so that we are diverted from this is a *positive hindrance*, even if it be a thing apparently so excellent as service.

## ***3. Self-occupation Induced by Physical Weakness***

Believers with weak bodies are in special danger of becoming very self-centered. Their condition and circumstances tend to make them very much objects of consideration to themselves. There may be need for great care, for special diet and treatment, and this very often turns to *self-occupation*, and the soul's spiritual joy declines. I dare say some of my readers have no difficulty in recognizing the symptoms of this baneful malady. You would like to know if there is a cure for it. Well, I believe there is. The remedy for this kind of self-occupation is to know the love and support of Christ as Priest. I believe the Priesthood of Christ comes into exercise to sustain us above the self-occupation into which we should otherwise sink. In His love He makes His sympathy a reality to our hearts, and the fact that He considers our trouble and has known our soul in adversity as One touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been in all points tempted as we are apart from sin, draws our hearts to Him in a very blessed way. In nearness to Himself we enjoy His love, and are assured of His support, and the moment our hearts come consciously into the circle of His love self is no longer the center. It is thus drawing our hearts to Himself that Christ succors us. To find that we are objects of consideration to *Him* is an infinite solace, and it brings *Him* before our hearts in such a way that we are sustained above the consideration of ourselves. There is the positive support of *His* love; and thus our weakness becomes the occasion of proving the personal love and support of Christ, so that we are sustained in the joy of God's favor. We are sensible that we need support – that the love of Christ in this blessed way is an indispensable necessity – but we *may have* the support that we need. The love of Christ makes it available for us. His known love is the sure pledge of it to our hearts. And thus supported by Him, we may have – in spite of much weakness – the unclouded light and joy of God's favor in our souls.

#### **4. *The Self-occupation of Idleness***

Few things are treated with such severity in scripture as idleness, and there can be nothing more destructive of all spiritual joy. People who have no particular household or business duties, and who are not engaged in some form of service, are almost invariably self-occupied and unhappy. It is the will of God that men and women should have some form of occupation, and this ordinance of God cannot be set aside without evil results. A good many cases of spiritual depression would be quickly cured by a little more work. It is better to dig in the garden, to chop firewood, or to break stones on the road, than to do nothing.

Furthermore, if the Lord has called you to any little service of a more spiritual sort you cannot be negligent or slothful in it without suffering loss in your soul. Devotedness will necessarily produce diligence, and where these are lacking the light and joy of God's favor are not likely to be the conscious portion of the heart.

It is thus, as having access by faith into the favor of God, as being alive unto God in Christ Jesus, being armed with the mind to suffer in the flesh, and as delivered from self-occupation of every kind, that we may know what it is, not only to be clear as to doctrine, but to be in *the light and joy* of acceptance. God would have us to enjoy His favor, which is better than life, and to know the answer in our souls to the wondrous desire, "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." Thus may we "find in Abba's favor our spirit's present home."

