

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ACCEPT CHRIST?

Part 1

by A. W. Tozer

PLEASE NOTE: This sermon has been edited as little as possible so as to fully retain the flavor and spirit of the spoken word.

Now my relation to Jesus Christ is one of those few matters of life or death. To the average one of us who listen now it's taken for granted that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: I take that for granted; I assume that, I know that's true, I don't in any wise question it. And then it's further taken for granted - and properly -- that we are saved by Christ alone without works. That, I also take for granted because it's declared there, I don't question it; I don't ask that somebody come and explain it:

it's so! He *did* die for our sins according to the Scriptures, He *did* rise again. The Scripture *does* say that we are saved by Christ alone without works.

But now the big question is -- and right here is a hole in the bridge where millions fall through -- how do I come into saving relation to Christ? He alone saves without human merit or works - but he doesn't save everybody! Therefore there must be some connection made or some relation sustained; somehow or another I come into a relationship to Christ that saves me. Now, what is that? And that is a matter of life or death. You dare not assume anything. You must know. Not to be sure isn't to gamble with your soul. Not to be sure is to be dead! Just as you dare not cross the mighty ocean without a compass; to do so would be to die. So you dare not assume that you have the relationship unless you have; it's got to be there before you dare accept it as being there: to be wrong on this is to be lost!

Now if you were to ask the average man, the average preacher or the average person - the average Christian anywhere - "How do I come into saving relation to Jesus Christ?" the answer would be one of three. People would either tell you "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" -- that's Acts 16:31 or, they would say "Receive Christ as your Savior" -- that's John 1:12, or else they would give you this other answer. (And of course, those first two answers are true; they're true!) Or else they

would give you this third answer, "Accept Christ as your personal Savior."

Now the word 'accept Christ' to the astonishment of a good many people does not occur in the Bible - it's not there. It's this 'accept Christ' doctrine that I want to talk a little bit about tonight. What is it to 'accept Christ'?

Now, I do not reflect on the words 'accept Christ' even though they're not in the Bible. It's possible to teach truth and yet not use words that are in the Bible always, because if what you say is the sum of what the Bible teaches on a subject then you're teaching truth provided the people know that that's the sum of the Bible teaching. So when you were told to accept Christ to bring us into saving relation to Him what the teacher was attempting to do is to say 'believe and receive' and 'believe' and 'receive' are Bible words though 'accept' is not a Bible word.

But accepting Christ has become the panacea all over the evangelical world and it has become fatal to millions! A whole attitude of accepting; the passive acceptance of Christ. This easy acceptance! A man will preach a tremendous sermon and then say "Now, what should you do? Accept Christ. Have you accepted Christ?" Or we go to the bedside of a dying man: "Have you accepted Christ?" And if he says he has, why, we pat his head and the next day or two we preach that he's in heaven twanging a harp. Well, now I'm awfully afraid that there are millions of people who

are perishing because they are being told to accept Christ and they don't know what's meant by it.

You see, to tell a man to 'accept Christ', while it is relatively right, it yet, if not carefully explained, makes Christ to stand hat in hand waiting on my pleasure; neatly awaiting my verdict on Him. It makes Him apply to me, instead of my applying to Him. It permits me to accept Christ by an impulse of my mind or my emotions and accept Him painlessly and at no cost and no inconvenience.

Somebody suggested that the cross of Christ should not inconvenience people. Well, it is the most inconvenient thing in the world, this cross of Christ! It took a man by the name of Jesus in the height of his healthy human life and took Him out on a hillside and killed Him there - now, that's an inconvenient thing for Him! And any cross is inconvenient; it's a most inconvenient thing, this accepting Christ, if we know what we mean by it. But the accepting Christ of popular theology has no inconvenience attached to it.

Now let's look at how it might have worked back in Old Testament times. Suppose that Moses had told Israel that awful, wonderful night, "Now, stay in your houses and kill the lamb and put the blood on the door post and stay right there and accept the fact that it's done - the great transaction's done! You are delivered by the Passover blood. Thank God

and rejoice and establish a tabernacle and stay right where you are. And they would have stayed right there in Egypt with the blood on the door and God waiting to take them out but they stayed right where they were, they would have died in Egypt! They had to get up and get out of Egypt to prove they believed in the power of the passover blood!

That prodigal son, look at him. A certain man had two sons and one of them said unto his father, "Give me the goods that falleth to me and he divided unto them, the two of them, the boys, his living. And after a few days the boy left - the younger - and went into a far country and there he spent his substance in riotous living. And when he became hungry and had nothing to eat he went and attached himself to a swineherd and he fed swine. And he was there in the swine-pen and he got hungry because his wages wouldn't buy enough to eat. And it was a humbling thing for a Jew to feed swine. And one day a man appears - and here I depart from the Scriptures. One day a young man appears and this young man says to this boy who had gone away from home and was feeding swine - he had a bundle of tracts, this young feller, he was just out of Bible school - and he had been taught how to win souls in nine easy lessons.

And he goes up to this prodigal son lying among the swine and he says, "I have good news for you!" And he looks up and says, "Thank God, I need it. I need good news. What is it?" "Your father is ready to forgive you!" "Well," the boy says, "thank the Lord!" "Your father is ready to forgive

you; do you believe it?" And the boy says, "Yes, I believe it." "All right now, thank God now, let's bow our heads and you thank the Lord you're saved. You believe the father forgives you. Yes, well, Amen! Now, we'll thank the dear Lord that you're saved. And now goodbye! Don't forget to witness, and sometime I'll be around again."

So this swineherd stays right there in the far country and he gets zealous and missionary and he goes out and he starts to make converts among the other swineherds and pretty soon he has them all believing that the father forgives, and they all do, and say, "I thank God the father forgives." Alright, and then they build a little tabernacle call it the First Tabernacle of the Converted Swineherds. And they all stay right there in the far country; nobody goes home. And that boy is still ragged and dirty and smelly and the people -- the respectable people of the neighborhood -- when they pass by elevate their nose and hurry by. And they say, "So persecuted they the prophets which were before us. It is the result of our holy living that they are giving us the cold shoulder."

Then one day while they are singing choruses in this First Church of the Converted Swineherds in the far country a young fellow comes along and asks permission to speak and he rises and says to them, "Put away your sins, ye wicked! Put away your sins! Learn to do good; cease to do evil, be righteous and follow the Lord and do good and you'll be saved." And they pick him up and throw him out and say, "He's a legalist!" and that he

'doesn't believe in grace.' "Why, we're saved by accepting the doctrine." But this young fellow wanders off and time goes on and the fatted calf gets old and dies and the father passes away and the boy stays on in the far country.

Now that's evangelism as it is preached a good deal today in America! It is, "Believe on Christ. Accept Christ and stay where you are!" Now that is excused and explained by a hundred different learned ways but it leaves the sinner in his sins! And the man in his sins will be damned as certainly as the sun rises in the east and goes down in the west!

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ at one time passed by and He said if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Those beautiful words of Jesus! "If any man will come after me...." Notice that He is interested and He is inviting; He is even urging but He is not begging! We have reversed things in these last days so that Jesus stands on trial and we sinners stand in the place of the judge! And if we should choose to quit our sins and follow Him we think we've done Him a service! And in the meantime He stands pensively waiting!

My friends I want you to note that He passes by and if any man will come he shall live eternally and he shall gain eternally but if any man will not he shall lose eternally but Jesus Christ will lose nothing! Remember that if a sinner comes to Jesus, Jesus gains nothing and if he refuses to come,

Jesus loses nothing for Jesus Christ is God and God is self-contained and self-sufficient and He holdeth the world in His hand! And if I come to Him I do not enrich Him; if I stay away from Him I do not impoverish Him. It is the whole thing, my brethren and sisters: For me, I am the gainer and the loser: He is neither gainer nor loser. If I come He does not gain for the stars in their courses are His and the seraphim and the cherubim and the principalities and powers and might and dominions and archangels and Heaven itself and the sea of glass, all are His! So that He cannot gain anything by my coming and He will not lose anything by my not coming: remember that! But if I come, He says, "Let Him deny himself." Now this is just what we daren't tell people these days! This is just what the evangelists of another day told people! But this is just what we're afraid to tell them now: "Let him deny himself."

And in the dim light of modern religious notions it's an odd thing that Christ should place such an obstacle before people and that He should lay down a condition for following Him; a condition that's exactly contrary to human nature. Nobody wants to deny himself; we want to preserve ourself and self-preservation is the first law of nature, according to everything that I've heard. And yet He lays down a condition for following Him that runs exactly contrary to human nature; runs counter to everything that's taught us in the schools; contradicts the instincts of self-preservation; arrays all the power of our natural self against Jesus Christ; cuts down on the number of those that will come.

Our Lord plainly, often, turned and cut down on the number of those that would come and in doing it He stepped up the quality of those who would come. But we step up the quantity and we don't care too much about the quality. If we can just get them to come! If we can just get them forward and say, "Two thousand nine hundred and twelve (or five hundred and six or whatever it is) came." Well, our Lord cared little about how many came! But He said if anybody will come, let him come - he's welcome to come. I came to die for him; I'm rising to plead for him and if he will come, let him come. But in coming let him deny himself. Let him do exactly contrary to that which is said by the world to be the natural thing to do.

Now I wonder if this Christ who laid down this obstacle -- who put this huge hurdle in front of the kingdom of God -- I wonder if that's the same Jesus, the same Christ that now we've got to excuse Him, and edit Him and amend Him, we have to coax and baby and plead to gain followers for Him; is this the same Jesus that gives everything and asks nothing? Is this the same Jesus that smiles and goes along with covetous business men and crooked politicians and carnal entertainers and half-saved cowboys? Is this the same Jesus? I don't think so at all! Paul talked about another Jesus and I think there's another Jesus loose among us and He's not the Jesus of the New Testament nor the Christ of God!

For the Christ of God is not begging business men; neither is He camping

at the dirty door of some half-converted sex-dancer and begging her to come and putting up with anything and making any kind of an excuse for her if she'll only come! He simply says, "Come, if you want to. Come, if you will. Anybody that will, let him come. Come, come to me!" But He doesn't beg and He doesn't coax and He doesn't compromise and He doesn't in anywise change His terms. He makes the terms and you accept them.

A great many people come to the altar and howl and we say, "Well, he's really under conviction. He's having a wonderful time there." What he's doing is he's trying to get the Lord to meet his terms! Well, the Lord will never meet your terms, Mister! You'll die and go to hell before He'll ever meet your terms! He lays His terms down and you meet them! He is God, and you're a sinner! And you meet His terms! Young people meet His terms. Kids meet His terms. We all meet His terms and whether it be presidents or kings or queens, they'll all meet His terms - and they must! He positively never compromises! "Let him come unto Me, let him deny himself, let him take up his cross and follow Me." Now, that is to accept Christ!

Now what is to accept Christ? Well, let me define it for you a little more closely. Acceptance of Christ is to form an attachment to the person of Christ; to the person of Jesus Christ. It's not to fall in love with a tender-faced Jesus. It is to realize that this tender-faced Jesus is also Lord

and God! That God has made Him Lord over all things and Head of the Church and that He has the keys of death and hell and that He will sit upon the throne judging all mankind and that God has given all power into His hand - this mighty Lord Jesus! It's to form an attachment to Him that is revolutionary, reversing and transforming the life. If your Christian conversion did not reverse the direction of your life; if it did not transform it then you're not converted at all, you are simply a victim of the 'accept Jesus' heresy!

And then, what is it to accept Jesus? It is to form an attachment to the person of Christ that is not only revolutionary but it is complete. That is, you can't compartmentalize your life. A lot of us try to compartmentalize our life and we say, "Jesus, you can have the front room and the living room and the den and the upstairs bedroom but the bedrooms at the back and the bedrooms at the front and the den you can't have. You can't go to the basement; you only can stay in certain parts of my life." Well, now, that kind of horrible, base dealing with the Lord Jesus Christ cannot but cause us to be lost at last! For me to accept Christ means that I am to accept Him in every part of my being and that I am to form an attachment to Him, an emotional, an intellectual, a volitional attachment which is complete, leaving no part of the life unaffected. If He cannot control you, He cannot save you. And if He cannot control all of you, He cannot control any of you!

And then, it's to be an attachment that is exclusive. I mean that Christ is not to be one of several interests. They tell us that in some countries - I shall not name them for these tapes get around; I understand they're going to Japan, and I'm not going to mention names of countries - but I'm going to tell you this that there in some places where they will accept Christ and enthrone Him just as you enthrone a statue somewhere in your home but they make Him one more of several vital interests. He is one more of several.

There is a church on Riverside Drive in New York City across from that other tomb, Grant's tomb, and they have a tinpanum sort-of an affair, up above it, you know an arch around, and they have concrete or maybe cut-stone - more likely cut-stone, seeing the money that was put into it - heads of various great men. And they have Moses there, I think, and they have Socrates there and they have Isaac Newton there and they have Jesus there. And they have, I suppose, Washington there, and a few more. Jesus is there! He is one of several interests!

Mark you my brethren: a Christian is one who specializes. He's an exclusivist. He believes in Jesus Christ exclusively. He believes in Him as Lord exclusively and that excludes all other possible interests, possible saviors -- it excludes all other possible hopes. The Christian who truly is born anew and has accepted Christ rightly has accepted Him exclusively so that He is to you what the sun is to the earth: he is that which you

revolve around. He is the central sun and you are an orbit moving round Him held by the bonds of His love and lightened by the light of His face. And while you do have other interests, they are minor and they're secondary and they take their place down the scale: Christ is first! The Lord Jesus Christ is first! And for Him, I surrender everything; to Him I give all to Jesus Christ my Lord and my Savior. He can command me! He's the head of my wife, He's the head of my children, He's the head of my ambitions, He is first and everything else is last! Anything else is not New Testament Christianity, brother and sister; anything else is a compromise and it leaves people half-saved, confused, frustrated, bewildered and in the dark!

Jesus Christ is your exclusive Savior and all other relationships are determined and conditioned by this one over-whelming, almighty relationship! Don't we see this in the stories our missionaries tell us? Don't we read it in Foxe's Book of Martyrs? Don't we see it in the story of men and women down the centuries who have taken Jesus Christ and had to walk out on their families to take Him? -- Who have taken Jesus Christ and had to give up their jobs to take Him? -- Who have taken Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and have had to do things that shortened their lives in order to take Him?

If you are not sufficiently given to Jesus Christ and exclusively attached to Him that you'll be willing to put your life on the block for Him I can

not see how you can claim to be a Christian!

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