

Acceptance and Forgiveness

Television programs and newspaper articles often deal with the problems of teenagers. We hear again and again what we have heard before. Teenagers need to be accepted but feel pressured to succeed. They fear that they will fail and be rejected. People of every age are in that situation. We need to be accepted by other people. But society pressures us to achieve "success," whatever that is.

It gets complicated. We begin to fear rejection in case of and because of failure. The pressure increases when personal worth is based on achievement. Our value, even in our own eyes, comes to depend on some idea of performance.

What are we to do? We can work like mad to achieve success. But that effort is doomed to failure, eventually, for everyone. Even those who succeed most in worldly terms are not satisfied. They still want more and more success.

Or we can struggle to be free from mental and emotional slavery to success. We can view our worth - and the worth of others - as a reality with or without money, fame, beauty, power, or any of the elements that spell "success" in the world.

Do not misunderstand. We should work hard and do our best to be helpful in family and community. But our sense of worth and our acceptance by others should never depend on what we do but only on what we are - human persons created by God, loved by God, redeemed by God.

The point is to take the pressure off. But can it be done? In a world of sinners like us, this pressure remains rather constant. The only way for such acceptance to survive is for forgiveness to occur - and recur. We all do wrong things. We all disappoint ourselves and others. We need forgiveness. That is the only way for acceptance to endure.

What is forgiveness? It is not: "No harm done" or "It doesn't matter." That denies that anything is or was wrong. That is condoning, not forgiving.

Forgiveness is: "You did wrong. I was angry. But I never stopped loving you. I have forgiven you. I am not angry anymore." Forgiveness is acceptance despite wrongdoing (or wrong-saying, or wrong-thinking, or wrong-being).

Christianity is the religion of forgiveness and acceptance by God. Other religions tell us we can do enough good work to make God like us and accept us. Christianity admits that we are sinners and that sin is seriously wrong.

But God loves us despite our sins! God the Father has sent His Son to be our Saviour. Jesus has suffered God's entirely justified anger against our sins. He has satisfied that anger for us. He has appeased it by His pain and death.

The message of Christianity is that God forgives and accepts sinners. He welcomes believers as His children for eternity - in spite of sin, because of Christ!

God is at work in His Word to convince us that He really has forgiven our sins for Jesus' sake. It is not based on anything we do. That forgiveness is the only really powerful motive for us to forgive and accept others also.