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ACCEPTED BY GOD

Dear,

The World Cup soccer tournament is held every four years and teams from many nations compete to be called the world champions. Fan enthusiasm over this event reaches the pinnacle of absurdity and people behave in ways that boggle the mind to show support for their home team. Consider the following: In 1969, a qualifying game between Honduras and El Salvador erupted into a literal war that lasted two weeks. In the end, 2,000 people were dead and 10,000 wounded. Here are some of the bizarre events that took place during the 2002 World Cup:

- In Russia's 1-0 loss to Japan, riots left two people dead and dozens injured.
- A South Korean fan wanted to inspire the team to victory; so he soaked himself in paint thinner, set himself on fire, and died.
- Approximately 900 Japanese fans wanted to show their support, so they all dove off a bridge in Osaka into the highly polluted and stagnant Dotombori River.
- In Jakarta, 48 prisoners escaped jail because the guards were all glued to a TV set watching a World Cup game.

When we read these stories, we tend to shake our heads in disbelief that anyone would do such things for the sake of a soccer game. But have you ever wondered if God sometimes "shakes His head in disbelief" over certain things Christians do just to be acceptable by Him?

As I have shared in the past, I thank God that I was raised in a Christian home by parents who were born again. They were active in church and made sure all of us kids were there just about every time the doors were open. One of the things they engrained in me was to give offerings. Even though I was young and obviously had no income, dad would always put a dollar in an envelope and give it to me so I could put it in the offering plate.

The envelopes we used were supplied by the church and on the front of them were several small boxes. Each box was individually labeled with such titles as "Bible Read?", "Bible Brought?", "Attend Sunday School?", and so forth. Point values were assigned for each category and we were supposed to put a checkmark in each box when we had done what it was asking. Someone kept track of all the points we earned and every so often, awards were given for different levels of points earned. The purpose of this was to motivate people to read their Bible, attend church, and so forth. But to a young child like myself, I seemed to think that my checked boxes and points represented some sort of spiritual achievement.

You may not have grown up in the same type of church I did, but there is a good chance your church might have instilled in you certain traditions which, if kept, would impress God so He would do good things for you. Here are some examples:

- A good friend of mine went to a church and was told to remove his necktie. The usher told him that they didn't wear such things in their church because it displeased God and gave glory to the devil. How so? Because the tip of the tie was pointing straight to hell.
- A family singing group went to a church to minister. When they took a break, the pastor got up and apologized to the entire congregation because the husband in the family had a moustache. That church was convinced that only a clean-shaven man was favorable to God.
- A woman trimmed the dead ends off of her extremely long hair and her fiancé almost called off the wedding. Why? Because he had been taught that a woman was only pleasing to God if she didn't cut her hair.

There are so many other examples of people doing things to try and be acceptable in God's eyes. Their intentions are right because they love Him with all their heart and want to show Him their love. They truly believe that all of the traditions they have been taught are the way to be pleasing before Him and earn His favor. What they fail to realize is that God already looks upon us with favor and nothing we do will ever cause Him to love us more.

But why is it that so many Christians believe they have to impress God or they won't be found acceptable? It is because they only see Him as "God", and not as "Father." Until we grasp the truth that He is our Father, we will continue to work to earn His favor.

Think of the term "born again." If we take each word separately and give it a simple definition, this is what we could say: "born" means "that which has been birthed"; and "again" means "a secondary event that is subsequent to a previous, similar event." Therefore, the phrase "born again" could be restated as "a second birth." If born again is a second birth, what was the first birth?

Our first birth took place nine months after we were conceived in our mother's womb. When we were born into this world we were a product of our parents, but the essence of our life was passed on to us by our father. In fact, science has proven that it is the father who produces the blood for a child. Thus, the union of our mother and father is what caused us to be born.

But the Bible says that when we accept Jesus as Savior we are born again. This means that we experience a second birth. If we experience a second birth, then there must be a second father involved. Well, there is and that father is God. Look at the following verse,

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:23)

Peter is using a natural example to drive home a spiritual truth. When we were born the first time, it was a result of corruptible seed from a natural father. In other words, our natural father could only pass on to us what had been passed on to him, which was a natural seed with a sin nature. Paul explains this in his letter to the Romans.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Romans 5:12)

When Adam sinned he died spiritually. As he produced children, he passed that spiritual death, or sin nature, on to them. As his children produced children, that sin nature was passed to the next generation. This process continued until your father, by his corruptible seed, passed the sin nature and spiritual death on to you. This is why, as Paul wrote, “all have sinned.” A sin lifestyle was produced through us by the sin nature in us. It is how we were born and we were incapable of changing it ourselves.

However, when we accept Jesus, His blood washes away the sin nature that was produced in us by the corruptible seed of our first father. In its place, God “fathers” us by releasing into us His incorruptible, spiritual seed. In this process we experience a second birth: we are born again. Instead of a sin nature and spiritual death, we now have God’s nature and spiritual life. We will *never* be deity, but our spiritual Father has passed on to us what He has in Himself. His seed is incorruptible in that it originates from Him and He cannot be corrupted, that is, made a sinner. In other words, He can never pass corruption or sin on to anyone that He fathers.

I realize that some people did not grow up in the best of home situations. But generally speaking, most of us had no difficulty grasping the fact that we were a part of a family and that “dad” was our father. We knew we could walk in and out of the front door as we pleased. At night, we didn’t have to scrub floors for the privilege of sleeping in the bed he had provided. Our fathers saw us sick, healthy, happy, sad, clean, dirty, in good moods and in bad. When we wanted something, we simply asked instead of presenting half of our allowance as an inducement to get what we desired. Interestingly, our dads *knew* it would be like this before we ever came along.

In spite of the fact that all of these things are true and we understand them quite well, religion has never drawn the connection between the earthly father-child relationship and our relationship with Father God. In the natural, we are the literal offspring of our dad. No matter how many miles we live away from him, we are still his “born child”. When we accept Jesus, the spiritual nature of sin and death given to us by our natural father is totally and completely removed. Our second birth originates from God and we are now His literal offspring.

The religious mindset cannot handle such theology. “*You’re making yourself equal to God,*” they cry. But when Jesus was trying to explain these very same things, the religious mindset made the same statements.

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18)

The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. (John 10:33)

Until Christians can get past this “Pharisee” mentality and accept the fact that they are God’s literal children, they will live beneath the privileges of being in His family. He is our *Father*; He is the One who has brought us into existence. We are already accepted by Him *simply because He has passed His life on to us and we are His child!* Long hair or short hair, neck ties or no ties, facial hair or clean shaven, big offerings or no offerings, with or without these things and more, we are acceptable to Him. Please remember that He is God and He knows the beginning from the end. Therefore, *He knew beforehand how you would look and act, but He still made provision for*

you to be His child! If God didn't want a fuzzy-faced, neck-tie wearing person for a child, He would *never* have made provision for that individual to be born again.

Our problem has been that we don't seek to know Him as a Father. Instead, we establish all kinds of rules and laws that we're told will help us become acceptable by Him so we can get to know Him better. In reality, this systematic process of man's religion actually builds a wall between us and the One who has given us life. Instead of looking toward a loving, compassionate, merciful Father, we are pointed to a somewhat vengeful God we must impress with our appearance and works before being accepted in His presence.

Consider a baby when it is born. That baby does not know how to walk, sit up, eat, or use the bathroom. Does his father cast him aside because he does not know how to do these things? Absolutely not! His daddy will hold him, kiss him, change his diapers, and feed him; all the while teaching him and training him to do what he doesn't know how to do.

Spiritually, we fail to grasp that our Heavenly Father wants to do the same with us. Instead of putting a curse on us, rejecting us, and casting us aside, He wants us to come to Him to know His love. He wants us to know Him as our Father, someone who is always approachable who we can trust; someone who finds us acceptable just as we are. This doesn't mean He condones sin and disobedience, but it means we can have a relationship with Him as a member of a close, intimate family.

Our Father's blessings are based on the fact that Jesus died in our place so we, through His sacrifice and blood, could be brought into His family. You will never be able to dress a certain way, give enough money, or attend church enough to gain more of the Father's love and acceptance than you already have. Everything He has is available to you because you are His child. Don't let religion train you to think as though you are still under the law of Moses that was given to a people with a sin nature. Your sin nature is gone and you now have the life and nature of your Father!

I encourage you to spend time with Him, asking Him to help you understand the fullness of what it means to be His child. Yes, He is God, but He is also your Father. He is the one who produced in you your second birth. I have learned that the more I get alone and worship Him, saying things like, *"You are my Father and I am your child; I am your literal offspring. I love you and worship you. Thank you so much for bringing me into your family. I bless you, Father, I love you so much!"* the reality of who He is to me becomes clearer.

The Creator of the universe loved you so much that He passed His life on to you. He is your Father and you are His child. Praise God! May this truth become a foundation of your life.

In His Grace,

Jim

P.S. - Not long ago I preached a message that will help you more deeply understand the potential of your born again spirit. It is called, *Don't Underestimate Your New Nature*. A CD of this sermon can be ordered on the next page.

