

**“Christian Spirituality:  
Simply Accept the Fact that You Are Accepted”**

Galatians 5:1-6, 1John 4:12

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Rev. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

When I drove Sunrise blvd early this week, I saw a man holding up a sign and waving it like commercial sign near a gas station right next to Highway 50 entrance. The sign says, “Remember John 3:16”. As we know John 3:16, it says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” I appreciate that guy’s passionate reminder of God’s love. But we need to know how God’s love should be revealed in our real lives. Nowadays, many people talk about spirituality. What would it be your one sentence response if you were asked to speak about Christian spirituality? I would say this: The most important basic and Christian spirituality is that God accepted us all as we are. No matter who you are, God loves you dearly. So simply accept the fact that you are accepted in Jesus. I believe that this is the essence of Christian Spirituality.

In the first century, Apostle Paul had to deal with a similar problem of full acceptance inside Churches, especially in the region of Galatia during his first missionary journey. Paul knew that there was a serious conflict among the Churches, particularly between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. This was the motivation and background for this letter to Galatians. Apostle Paul wrote this letter to share his spiritual wisdom and advice. Let me share a little more what happened. When Paul passionately planted new churches in the first century, most Christians were Jews who had grown up under Jewish religious customs and regulations like Moses law. But when these Jews started to follow Christ, their relationships with God changed. They surely experienced the full acceptance of God’s love in Jesus and were able to pursue of spiritual maturity in Jesus’ teachings. But after a while, some of Jewish Christians missed their old Jewish practices and began to bring their Jewish religious practices and traditional elements into their Christian faith. Circumcision was a great example. Some Jewish Christians started arguing that other Christians must do the same.

“Freedom in Christ” is Apostle Paul’s whole understanding of Christ Jesus and basis of Christian Spirituality. In our first Scripture reading, Paul says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (5:1).” Paul clearly pointed out that the requirement of circumcision is a merely part of a yoke of slavery, which is not a essential part of Christian spirituality. Actually, Paul had brought

Gentiles into the Christian faith free from burdens. He believed that legalism is so dangerous in Christian spirituality. Paul emphasized his Christian stance saying, “If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all (5:2-3).” In other words, circumcision would turn out a conditional judgment to Gentile Christians, not for the experience of full acceptance. In Paul’s conviction in Christ Jesus, Christian freedom means “Full acceptance by God.” Without any condition, you are accepted as you are. This was why Jesus died for us on the cross. The spirit of acceptance was God’s serious purpose of cross. Truly God’s fully acceptance of all should be our basic Christian spiritual principle.

Jennifer Rosthchild wrestled with assurance of acceptance in her daily devotion.<sup>1</sup> I want to share her story with you: “Several years ago, my friend, Lisa was going through a crafty phase and wanted to make a piece of word art for me. She texted this question: “If one word could become a reality in your life, what would it be?” This took me awhile! The one word that kept coming to mind was “accepted,” but I was too embarrassed to admit that feeling accepted was what I really longed for. I was a Christian, so I knew God accepted and loved me unconditionally. Wasn’t that already a reality in my life? The reality was, I was afraid God accepted everyone but me. In pondering my one word, God began to show me that I associated my performance with my acceptability. Here’s what I (wrongly) believed: *If I am good, I am acceptable. If I help people ... if I am a blessing instead of a burden ... well, then I am accepted. But, if I fail, blow it or mess up, then I feel like a reject — not acceptable to me, not to others and certainly not to God.* My belief was I was acceptable only when I was at the top of my game or in the center of God’s will. *Clearly*, I had not truly embraced my identity in Christ because acceptance is what I already have. So, I texted Lisa back with my one word that I needed to embrace and believe: accepted. Lisa’s gift showed up in the mail a week later. It was a wooden ledge with the Scrabble letters A-C-C-E-P-T-E-D glued on it. This is a treasure to me because it is a constant reminder to see what I already have in God rather than seek it in the wrong ways and places. Lots of us struggle with trusting the truth that we’re acceptable to and accepted by God. We are accepted not because of what we do or don’t do; we are accepted not because of how we succeed or if we’re good. We are accepted not because of who we are, but because of who God is.”

Paul Tillich, a great theologian and philosopher in his article, “The Shaking of the Foundation” helps us to understand what full acceptance means in his new understanding of “sin” and “grace”. He redefined and suggested another word to us, “separation”, not as a substitute for the word “sin” but as a useful

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.sparkpeople.com/mypage\\_public\\_journal\\_individual.asp?blog\\_id=5984572](http://www.sparkpeople.com/mypage_public_journal_individual.asp?blog_id=5984572)

clue in the interpretation of the word “sin”. The word “sin” has the same root as the word “asunder”. In any case, *sin is a separation*. To be in the state of sin is to be in the state of separation. And he explains that separation is three fold: there is separation among individual lives, separation of a man and a woman from himself and herself, and separation of all people from God, the Ground of Being. Paul understands that this three-fold separation constitutes the state of everything that exists; it is a universal fact; it is the fate of every life. And it is our human fate in a very special sense. Speaking of “grace”, for other people, grace indicates the gifts that one has received from God and the power to do good things with the help of those gifts. But Paul Tillich points out that grace is more than gifts. In grace something is overcome; grace occurs in spite of something; grace occurs in spite of separation and estrangement. Grace is the reunion of life with life, the reconciliation of the self with itself, **Grace is the acceptance of that which is rejected.**

As Second Scripture readings affirm us, if we love one another, in other words, if we accept one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us. God loved the world and accepted each of us in Jesus as we are. The spirit of accepting others are the first spiritual principle that we need to practice in our words and acts. It is never easy to accept others because it is much easier to judge others than understanding others. It needs our patience and intentional spiritual discipline. That’s why we come to church, learn the Bible and are involved in spiritual ministries. In our real world, there are so many separations like prejudice and stereotype and discriminations among nations, races and even in our society either in visible forms or invisible ways. We are called to proclaim this good news to others who experienced separation, rejection and hurt in their relationships. We are called to proclaim God’s accepting love in Jesus. Let us keep working on and practicing God’s accepting love and grace in our spiritual practices. Amen.