

Sunday, January 1st sermon: "We are Accepted in the Beloved -- Some New Year's Resolutions"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
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Romans 8:8-9; Ephesians 1:6

Everything lost men do is sin. That's because they act without glorifying God, or fearing Him, or being thankful to Him, and without faith in Him.

That is why the birth of Jesus is such a great gift to us. He came to be our Savior! He came to save us from our sins!

We didn't even know how lost in sin we actually were, how hopeless we were, how dead in our sins we were. All of our so-called "good deeds" are condemned by God. The plowing of the wicked is even sin.

This deeply offends people, including most Christians, who think that they are able, by their "free will," to choose to do good works. They don't like the texts that teach that we are naturally "unable to please God."

Only in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can a believer do anything good and acceptable to God. Our only hope lies in the obedience and blood of our Savior.

Jesus is our only Righteousness! We are clothed in His Righteousness.

The longer believers possess the gift of Christ as Savior, the longer we worship our Redeemer, the longer we embrace His Gospel, the more we will treasure the Christmas gift of Jesus.

We might worry, how then can the saints ever do anything that pleases God?

Jesus made it clear that we can and we do. He judges at the end, that His people who carried out acts of kindness to His brethren, are counted as having done them unto their King Himself!

In our flesh, nothing can please God. But Paul then asserts, believers are not in the flesh, but in the Holy Spirit! Our bodies are dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

So long as any man pursues his own righteousness by law-keeping, all of that is saturated with sin, and actually sinful.

But Jesus did keep all the law of God perfectly, and did so in perfect love and fear of God, with all His body, heart, mind, and strength.

It is that perfect obedience that is credited to us!

So Jesus has taken away all our sin, including the sin of not acting in perfect love and gratefulness and fear of God.

Christ has wrought for us that perfect love and gratefulness and fear of God, and He has taken away our vain efforts to obtain our own righteousness by keeping the law.

Therefore, God sees our deeds in the Spirit as we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and God is well pleased with us for Jesus' sake.

In Philippians, Paul describes how it is God that works in believers to will and to do His good pleasure. This is meant to astound us, even to cause us to tremble, how God's power is strongly working in us, causing us to desire to obey Him, and to actually carry it out in obedience.

In Ephesians 2, Paul spells out our deadness in sin, and how we've been regenerated by the Spirit, saved by God's grace, and our hearts changed to trust in Christ's sacrifice, completely apart from works.

But then Paul declares, that God makes us His work product in Christ Jesus, unto good works, just like He had already ordained.

But God goes further still. Through Paul, He declares that God chose His people before the world began, that we should be holy and without blame in Jesus.

By God's own grace, and so that it might be praised by His people, He has made us accepted in the Beloved One!

Note that God ACCEPTED us. We are accepted even though, in our lostness, every single thing we did offended God. But God forgave our sins by the blood of Jesus.

God has MADE us accepted! This is something that God has done to His people – His people have nothing at all to do with being accepted!

Finally, God has made us accepted in His Own Beloved One, the Lord Jesus!

The reason God accepts any good deeds by His redeemed people, is because we are in His Dear Son. He has accepted us in His Own Lamb, Who died to save us from our sin.

Besides all that, there are several frank declarations in Scripture that God accepts as good things what He works in us in this life.

Peter tells us that, in Christ, we are built up as a spiritual house to God, and we are made a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

Hebrews tells us that by Christ, we are to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, giving thanks to His name, to not forget to do good and

to share our earthly possessions with the needy. God is well pleased with these things!

Paul praises the Philippians for sending him gifts to support his Gospel ministry, which he declares to be "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God!"

So our resolution this new year, is not to sit on our hands and do nothing. Instead, we are to seek to please God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

But for our righteousness, we are to continue to trust only in the obedience and blood of Jesus.

How God can be pleased with us is a mystery, and very hard to understand, once we grasp our true miserable condition as sinners.

But God gave us His Word, that He is very well pleased with us in Christ.

What kindness God has shown to poor sinners in His Beloved Son!