

## Do We Really “Accept” Jesus?

C.H.McGowen, MD

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One of my favorite lines from the delightful movie *The Music Man* occurs when the Mayor of River City admonishes his son for issuing forth a mild expletive such as “darn” or “drat” or “gee gosh”. The Mayor furls his brow and says, “Watch your phraseology boy!” I feel exactly the same way when I hear one Christian tell others that he has “accepted”, or that she ought to “accept” Christ as Savior. That “phraseology” emanates from the pulpit, the pews, and the tele-evangelist’s lips. It has the same effect on my ears, as does the sound that results when some one slides their fingernails down a blackboard. It’s time for all of us to examine the context of what we’re saying with that statement.

The call to accept Jesus will not be found anywhere within the pages of God’s Holy Word. The NIV translation uses it once in John 13:20 but the more recent New King James Version and English Standard Version correct the error. The original Greek text utilized the word *lambano*, which translates “receive”.

In John 1:11-12 we read, “He came to His own and His own people did not **receive** Him. But to all who did **receive** Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” (Emphasis mine) Now some of you may already be saying that this is a distinction without a difference. I disagree.

Jesus is the gift of God: We learn that in John 3:16 and John 4:10. This message was undoubtedly also the subject of many a Christmas Eve sermon. Now I dare say that most people wanting to know about your Christmas gifts would have asked what you “received”; they would not have asked what you accepted. Why then would we ever use that term when speaking of the Greatest Gift that one could ever be offered.

When we invite people to our homes for dinner and we meet them as the doorbell rings we “receive” them, we don’t accept them into our company. To say that we “accept” them could mean that we don’t really consider them worthy of our fellowship but because we are so generous we will condescend to accept them into our presence. When a newly born baby is presented to its proud parents the nurse

has wrapped the child in what is called a “receiving blanket”. That beaming mother and father don’t feel as though they have to accept that child, rather they gladly receive the little one into their family. Following a marriage ceremony it is traditional for the wedding party to stand in a “receiving” line; we never refer to it as an acceptance line. Although parenthetically, as an invited guest at the wedding, and a rather impatient sort of guy, I sometimes find standing for a long period of time in that line difficult to accept.

As I just indicated, the term “accept” can sometimes be put into a rather pejorative connotation and that should never be the way in which we view our initial experience with Christ. There are many things in this life that we have to accept; illness, loss of a job, cranky neighbors, natural disasters etc. However Jesus, to whom we were drawn by the Father (John 6:44) and in whom we have come to believe as enabled by the Father (John 6:65), is not one of those situations we find hard to accept.

This Gift of God was planned for us before the creation of the universe (Ephesians 1:4-5) and is One that none of us deserve.

This eternal Gift was wrapped in human flesh through the incarnation and presented to each of us who have come to believe by way of God's effectual call through His Holy Spirit as we were regenerated. Jesus said to His disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit," (John 20:22). Furthermore our ability to receive the Gift was made possible through another gift, that of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)

When Elihu was addressing Job and his three "friends" he uttered this proverb which we would all do well to heed, "Hear my words, you wise men, and give an ear to me, you who know; for the ear tests words as the palate tastes food. Let us choose what is right; let us know among ourselves what is good." (Job 34:2-4) So let us all keep these things in mind as we share our faith with an unbelieving world; may we choose the right words in expressing our joy and what is good in describing our "inexpressible Gift". Jesus is a Gift to be **received** not accepted and when we hear another believer say that he has "accepted Christ", just say "Watch your phraseology boy!"

I close with these words from our faithful brother Paul who knew well the distinction that is a difference, "Therefore, as you **received** Christ

Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:6-7)