

Significant Lives — Chapter 10

By Jim Golden —
ACCEPTANCE — Selective Or Conditional?

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 5:17 NIV)

In 1987, two years after my mother's death, Terry and I moved the whole family to California. We were living in the high desert town of Lake Los Angeles, a suburb of Palmdale. Lake LA, as the residents like to call it, was in the middle of a construction boom that was soon to pop. At her peak she could boast about 13,000 folks, a great many were employed in the aircraft industry. It was during this time we received a cassette tape in the mail. It was a radio broadcast by a Pastor from the area we had just moved from. His guests on the show were Charles and Dotty, some old friends of ours.

As I listened, something Dotty said struck a chord deep within my heart. **"We must create an environment where failure isn't fatal."** This would be an environment of unconditional acceptance. So often the acceptable standard for behavior set by the Church doesn't allow for any shortcoming or failure. Or those who do fail become fatalities. When I speak of unconditional acceptance I am speaking of the quality of acceptance Jesus showed us as unbelieving sinners. People who were his enemies and scoffed at him were the ones he died for. *In the full knowledge of all our sin and sinfulness he shed his blood.*

How many of us have struggled with recurring sin at one time or another? Or secretly held resentment towards someone? How many times have we covered up a wound received at the hands of a brother or sister? We confess our dilemma to the Lord, but because of fear of what others might think we seldom confide in anyone or try to right a wrong. To our surprise it keeps coming back to haunt us like a specter in the night. Sooner or later there is a parting of the ways because there isn't the freedom to talk things through. Finally our heart becomes hard and we move into the "backslider" stage. Or guilt, self-condemnation and bitterness, inducts us into the ranks of the "spiritually handicapped".

Conditional acceptance is any level of acceptance we show toward each other that is less than the level of acceptance that Jesus has for us. Conditional acceptance produces fear of rejection. Fear of being rejected causes many to cover up their recurring sin. You notice I placed everything mentioned above, in the category of recurring sin. Failure to try and resolve any of the above situations is a failure to walk in love. Walking in love is God's number one command!

I am not suggesting an environment of unconditional acceptance of sin, but of the sinner. I am not speaking of the one who refuses to admit their sin and forsake it. I am speaking of the weak saint that has yet to understand, the victory of Calvary and the power of the blood of Jesus.

We must remember that Jesus has dealt with the problem of sin forever through the shedding of his blood. When it was accepted on Heavenly Altar for the

the shedding of his blood. When it was accepted on Heaven's Altar for the remission of mankind's sin it became eternal in its efficacy. The problem before mankind today is not a sin problem but a sinner problem. How to transform the sinner into the image of God is the dilemma facing us today. Focusing on our sinfulness has absolutely no transforming value. Focusing on the finished work and person of Christ, and clothing each other in the robes of his righteousness, and unconditional acceptance however, has great transforming virtue.

We must stop trying to manipulate the transforming work of God in each other's lives through our "new laws". Conditional acceptance is designed to make others conform or perform according to our expectations, definitions or timetables. Instead, we need to, through the power of God's loving acceptance, create an atmosphere where Jesus can transform us into his image. We are now his to do with as he pleases, not each other's.

At no stage in our Christian life does "good moral character" become an acceptable trade for "Godly Character". Many religions exhibit good moral character. At no point can we define spiritual maturity as the fruit of our endeavor, rather than the Fruit of the Spirit. The terrible force of rejection's destructive activity in our lives, no matter what the source, can only be healed by the endless, unconditional acceptance of God's love. Actually the only condition to *receive* this unconditional acceptance is faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. What he did for us when we first came to him, he does for us every minute of every day, throughout eternity! That's not "greasy grace," that's the Gospel. In my experience, it is the goodness of the Lord that produces true change in his children. An environment where acceptance is selective breeds fear and only delays deliverance.

Paul was a man who knew the unconditional acceptance of God. The power of God's acceptance has shaped and molded every great man and woman of God in history. Paul never forgot his persecution of the Church. Peter never forgot his denial of Christ on the eve of his crucifixion. It was the memory of their wretched state in comparison with God's beauty and holiness that allowed His Spirit to make them great. Their condition apart from the work of Christ was settled forever in their minds. They had ceased striving to be better or to make anyone else better. They reveled in the finished work of Calvary and taught others to do likewise.

This final acceptance of our condition apart from God's covering and intervention eliminates "double-mindedness" and allows us to finally take our eyes off ourselves and each other and fix them on the only one who can change us, Jesus. We no longer know ourselves or one another after the flesh. We begin to see the finished work of Christ and it changes each of us.

Jesus said he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against her. Our responsibility is to walk in the unconditional acceptance and love of Jesus Christ and leave the assembly work to him. Many of us have been running with a vision we feel God has given us. In our excitement we have forgotten Who our God is. We have forgotten the one who came to serve and give His life as a ransom for others. We have forgotten the One who made himself of little repute. We have forgotten the friend of sinners and harlots. We have forgotten that HE IS LOVE and has clothed us in a righteousness that needs no more perfecting. Once again we have averted our gaze from the only one worth looking at.

one worth looking at.

A friend of mine has a sign in his office that says, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." Who Jesus is and what he does is the "main thing"! Help create an environment where failure isn't fatal and honesty, openness and acceptance can thrive. I guarantee we will all be the better for it. Remember Jesus accepts us, accept one another also.

There are sins of commission and omission. Both defile and divide the Body of Christ. If we know that forgiveness is not an option and that we all miss the mark daily, we might all embrace a more gentle and restorative spirit.

Let us create an environment where failure isn't fatal and love and acceptance permits the salvation of God to flow freely in our lives. An old axiom says, "together we stand, divided we fall." It must become more than a trite cliché, if we want to see the blessing God.

In every city in America there are war stories told of who's right and who's wrong in the divisions that have fraught the Church. I think it's time we all grew up and left the judgment to Him who judges righteously. It's time we dare to believe that He will perfect that which concerns every one of his children. The wheat and tares will be separated at the Harvest.

The rifts that exist between individuals and churches can be healed and overcome through our unconditional acceptance and love for each other. True acceptance recognizes our deep need for one another. In the war against Darkness, for the souls of men, we need all the love available. A basic military strategy is to divide and conquer. Let us create an environment where failure isn't fatal and let us begin in our personal lives. Learning to accept yourself is the key to accepting others.