

What Happens When We Accept Christ?

By Pastor Bob Johnson, Grace Point Church

What actually happens when Jesus Christ comes into your life? First, he saves you from your sins and the punishment you deserve as a result of them— a Christ-less eternity. This is called salvation, or regeneration, and has to do with what takes place in your heart: God gives you new life. Second, he justifies you. Justification has to do with your standing before God and includes the complete removal and forgiveness of your sins. Think about it! When you receive Jesus Christ into your life, you are completely forgiven. God's Word tells us, "*Brothers, listen! In this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins! Everyone who believes in him is freed from all guilt and declared right with God Justified - something the Jewish law could never do*" (Acts 13:38-39). Speaking of our sins, God says, "*I will never again remember your sins and lawless deeds.*" (Hebrews 10:17). What a wonderful promise!

Justification, however, is more than just the forgiveness and removal of the guilt and condemnation that accompany sin. While God has removed your sins and forgiven you of them, he has also placed the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ "into your account," so to speak. You don't have to earn it or try to achieve it. It is yours as a gracious gift from the God who loves you. To understand justification more fully, read the following Scripture passages and notes below.

God Promises Us His Gracious Forgiveness

*But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. **1 John 1:9 [NLT]***

The word *confess* means "to say the same thing as another" or "to agree with." To confess means that we are agreeing with God about our sin. We are seeing it as he does. We know that God hates sin. Therefore, to truly confess our sin means that we essentially feel the same way God feels about what we have done. After committing that sin, we will be determined to put it out of our lives and never do it again. That is true confession in the biblical sense. The reason many believers are not experiencing the forgiveness and joy they desire is because they have not yet truly confessed! Once we have met God's conditions, however, we will know his gracious forgiveness. We may not "feel" forgiven, but we are. We have his word on it.

God Has Balanced Our Moral and Spiritual Budget (see Romans 5:1-2)

When God justifies us, he does so by placing all of the righteousness of Christ to our credit. This balances the moral and spiritual budget for us. We now have sufficient "capital of character" to get on with the business of living.

Up to this point, salvation has been God's responsibility. From this point on, it continues to be his responsibility except that we are responsible for the wise investment of our "capital of character"—that is, we are responsible for living as God desires us to. It is as if your checking account was empty, but then someone made a \$100,000 deposit. What you do with that money is up to you.

God Calls Us His Children (see Luke 15:11-32)

This incredible story illustrates what happens when a person turns from sin and returns to God. First, notice that the father in the story did not give this prodigal son what he deserved—judgment and banishment. In the same way, we do not receive from God what we deserve—judgment and punishment for sin. Second, the young man was given what he did not deserve—the rights and privileges of full sonship. Likewise, although we are not worthy to be called children of God, he calls us sons and daughters. In summary, he doesn't give us what we deserve (judgement). He gives us what we don't deserve (forgiveness and justification).

Speaking of our sons and daughters, read on to see how God has adopted you into his family.

Adopted and Assured

We have looked at what happens when we are regenerated (when Christ comes into our lives) and when we are justified (when God forgives our sin and puts his righteousness in its place). Now let's look at another incredible thing God has done for us. He adopted us into his family as his children!

Adoption means "to be given the rights of a son or daughter." In essence, you have been given the full rights of sonship in the family of God as though you were born that way. The story of the Prodigal Son illustrates this (Luke 15:11-32). The wayward son thought that after leaving home, he would no longer be considered a son but would instead be treated as a hired servant. Much to his surprise, when he made the long journey home, his father welcomed him and smothered him with kisses. He then gave orders to bring out the best robe and to put a ring on his finger, signifying full rights as a son. That is exactly what God has done for you! Take some time to examine three scripture passages that assure you of your adoption into God's family.

God Disciplines His Children (see Hebrews 12:5-9)

Recognizing you are now a child of God is not some distant hope but a present reality. One of the ways God will remind you of this is by correcting you and bringing you back into line like a loving father when you stray away from him. Before we were believers, we may have felt no sense of guilt for certain things we did or did not do. But now that we are Christians, God's Holy Spirit shows us

the way to live, which includes correcting us. He does this not because he hates us, but because he loves us as his own dear children. Understanding this truth should help us in the way we behave.

You Have an Approachable Father (see Galatians 4:6)

The Hebrew word translated “dear Father” is *abba*, which is a word of affection that a young child would use endearingly toward his or her father. A western equivalent of that phrase would be “papa” or “daddy.” God does not want to be viewed as some distant, disinterested father, but as a loving, approachable father to whom you can turn at any time because you are his child.

His Promises Are Not Based upon Your Feelings (see 1 John 5:11-13)

There will be times as a Christian when you may not “feel” God’s presence. You may even be tempted to doubt that he has come into your life. But 1 John 5:13 does not say, “I write this to you who believe in the son of God so that you may *feel* you have eternal life.” This is because feelings come and go. They fluctuate. Nor does the Bible say, “I write this so that you may *hope*—if God is in a really good mood—that you have eternal life.” It says, “*so that you may know*. . .” Eternal life is yours! Stand on God’s promise to you. You are forgiven, justified, adopted into his family, and assured of salvation. Now that is reason to rejoice!