

# Does God save sinners just as they are ?

**Aim:** To find from the scriptures the answer to the question, “*Does God save sinners just as they are?*”

**Reading:** **1 Timothy 1:12-15** “...*Christ Jesus came.....to save sinners....*”

## **Introduction:**

For the last 20 years or so, Sydney (Australia) has hosted the “Gay and Lesbian Mardi-Gras”. The event has had a fair bit of media exposure, and is touted by some in society as a good thing in that it attracts the tourist dollar, *etc.* Conversely, there have also been those<sup>1</sup> from a Judea-Christian background who have spoken out against it, because of what God has to say about homosexuality (**Romans 1:27-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10**).

However, one particular year, I remember seeing on the news that some people from a “Christian” denomination took part in the parade. When a news reporter asked them why they were participating (given that some in the religious community had spoken out against the parade), their response was that, “*God accepts people just as they are, even homosexuals.*”

When I heard this, it reminded me that I had also heard people use **1 Corinthians 7:20, 24** to justify maintaining a life-style or practice that is contrary to the Word of God.

Therefore, today I would like us to examine what the Bible has to say about the statement, “*God accepts sinners just as they are.*”

- to look at what it does mean, and,
- to look at what it doesn't mean.

## **1) Background – A reminder that we are all sinners**

### a) We all sin

Sin is described as “*missing the mark*”<sup>2</sup> In the spiritual sense, it is falling short of what God requires. All unrighteousness (*i.e.* wrong-doing) is sin (**1 John 5:17a**).

Each and every one of us (of accountable age and sound mind) are guilty of sin (**Romans 3:23**). Even the most righteous of people recorded in the scriptures have sinned.

- Abraham wasn't straight-forward with the truth when he told Pharaoh that his wife (Sarah) was his sister (**Genesis 12:10-20**).
- David, a man after God's own heart (**1 Samuel 13:14; 16:1-13**), committed adultery with Bathsheba, then arranged to have her husband killed in battle to try and hide the affair (**2 Samuel 11:1-27**).

The only person who has lived here on earth, but hasn't sinned, is Jesus (**Hebrews 4:15**).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the “Reverend” Fred Nile. Because of his outspoken-ness, he has, at times, been ridiculed by the supporters of the parade. On more than one occasion, the parade included a float containing a large mock-up of his head on a platter.

<sup>2</sup> Strong's Concordance, Greek word number 264 – “*to miss the mark*”.

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### b) We must all give account to God

One of the problems for us as sinners is that, one day, we are going to have to stand before God in judgement (**Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10**) and give account for our lives (**Romans 14:12**). Each person is responsible for their own sins (**Ezekiel 18:20**). I will be responsible for my sins, and you will be responsible for your sins.

We read in **Romans 6:23** that “...*the wages* (i.e. penalty/reward) *of sin is death...*”, i.e. separation from God. On the day of judgement, God is going to take “...*vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” (**2 Thessalonians 1:7-8**).

If that were all there was to it, we would all stand before God condemned.

## 2) God has a plan to save man from his sins

### a) God doesn't want anyone to be lost

Because of our sins, we deserve to perish. We deserve to have the full force of God's wrath descend upon us.

But God doesn't want us to be lost – He doesn't want anyone to perish (**2 Peter 3:9**). However, justice must be done, because God is a just God (**Revelation 15:3b**) – He can't just turn a “blind eye” to sin.

So God has had an eternal plan to make it possible for man to be forgiven of his sins (**Ephesians 1:3-4**) – He made it possible for man to be saved. The central part of that plan was to send His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sins on our behalf (**Isaiah 53:4-6; John 1:29; Romans 5:8; Hebrews 10:12-14**). And that's what He did – **Galatians 4:4; 1 John 4:9; Romans 5:6-8**.

### b) The gospel is available for everybody

It doesn't matter what country you come from, or what your background is, or what your social standing may be, or how bad your sins have been, God doesn't discriminate along these lines. In **Acts 10:34-35** we read, “...*God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*”.

Under the Old Testament, the Jews were God's chosen people (**Deuteronomy 7:6**). But now, under the new covenant, nationality is irrelevant when it comes to being acceptable to God. Paul tells us in **Romans 10:12** that, “*There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.*”. And again in **Galatians 3:28**, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

- see also **Colossians 3:11**.

### c) Something must be done by man

Jesus' sacrifice allows us to have our sins forgiven (**Hebrews 10:12-17**). But while God's forgiveness is available to everyone (**Romans 5:18**), it is not automatic. Something must be done by man in order to receive God's mercy and grace (**Ephesians 2:4-5**). And so the gospel message, which tells man

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what he has to do in order to be saved, needs to be preached to all (**Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 1:16**)

### 3) Does God accept us, just as we are, when we hear and obey the gospel ?

So then, given our sinful state, will God accept us, just as we are, when we hear and obey the gospel? To answer that question, let us look at examples of conversion from the scriptures.

#### a) Those at Jerusalem on Pentecost

We see the gospel message first preached at Jerusalem in **Acts 2**. The time-frame is around seven weeks<sup>3</sup> after Jesus had been crucified and risen from the dead. Jews from many nations<sup>4</sup> are in Jerusalem for Pentecost – the Greek term for the Feast of Weeks<sup>5</sup> (**Deuteronomy 16:9-12**).

As Peter was preaching to them, they came to realise that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that they were guilty of having Him crucified (**Acts 2:36**). They realised the spiritual predicament they were in – they had sinned, and they now stood before God condemned by their sins. And so, having been pricked in their hearts, they asked Peter, “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (**Acts 2:37**). Peter’s response was that they should, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (i.e. forgiveness) of sins....*” (**Acts 2:38**).

Think, for a minute, what the people in this crowd were guilty of. They were complicit in having the Son of the Almighty God executed on a cross like a common criminal (**Matthew 27:20-23**). What sin could be worse than this? And what did God require of them before He would forgive them? Did He require that they go away, get their life in order, and then come back and ask His forgiveness? No He didn’t. What He required of them was that they repent (of their sin) and be baptised. Once they did that, we can see that God then added them to the church (**Acts 2:41, 47**).

#### b) Other example throughout the book of Acts

Throughout the book of **Acts** we see the same thing – for example;

- Simon the sorcerer – **Acts 8:5, 13**
- The Ethiopian Eunuch – **Acts 8:26-39**
- Lydia – **Acts 16:14-15**
- The Philippian jailor – **Acts 16:30-33**
- Saul (later called Paul – Acts 13:9) – **Acts 22:14-16**

**Point:** Whatever sins these people had committed in the past, all that God required of them at that point in time was for them to believe in Him (**Acts 16:30-31**), repent of their sins (**Acts 17:30**), confess Jesus as Lord (**Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10**), and submit to the waters of baptism (**Acts 2:38; 8:38; 16:33; Romans 6:3-5**). If they did these things, God accepted them just as they were.

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<sup>3</sup> From **Deuteronomy 16:1-10**, we see that the Feast of Weeks was 7 weeks after the Passover. Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover Feast - **Matthew 26:17**.

<sup>4</sup> Read the nations listed in **Acts 2:5-11**.

<sup>5</sup> The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol 4, M-P, Page 692, “Pentecost”. This was one of three Feasts that all the men were required to attend in Jerusalem **Deut. 16:16**.

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### 4) Once a christian, can we stay just as we are and still be acceptable to Him ?

#### a) We need to be putting away sin from our lives

While God will accept us just as we are at the time of our conversion, He doesn't want us to remain in that state.

- some may be tempted to think that, because God's grace will take care of our sins, then it doesn't matter if we continue to sin. Paul addresses this attitude in his letter to the Romans – "*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!*" (**Romans 6:1-2; 15**).

God expects us to grow spiritually (**2 Peter 1:5-8**), and to put sin out of our lives (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**). There is a manner of life that is required of us that is in keeping with our new spiritual status (**Ephesians 5:8-10**). We are to lead lives that are pleasing to God (**Colossians 1:10**).

Obeying the gospel took care of our past sins. But in spite of our best efforts, we will still sin at times (**1 John 1:8, 10**), and will continue to need God's forgiveness. But our continued forgiveness by God is conditional. Paul told the Colossians that they will continue to be presented before God as "...*holy, blameless, and above reproach...if* (emphasis mine – SK) *indeed you* (and we - SK) *continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast....*" – **Colossians 1:21-23a**.

- the apostle John says the same thing in **1 John 1:7**;  
"*If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*"

But what does "*walking in the light as He is in the light*" mean? It means living in accordance with God's Word (**Psalms 119:105**). It means living the way Jesus lived – doing those things that please the Father (**John 8:29b**). If we wilfully choose to continue living an unrepentant sinful life, then there will be a "...*certain fearful expectation of judgement.*" (**Hebrews 10:26-31**).

#### b) Repentance is ongoing

Repentance does not stop when we are baptised. Rather, it is an on-going process. It involves not just having a godly sorrow for having done the wrong thing (**2 Corinthians 7:10**), but it also involves changing our ways (**Luke 3:8a**).

- there are things that we need to "*put off*", and there are things that we need to "*put on*" – **Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:5-17**.

As a result, our lives should be one of continual change;

- our minds and thought processes should be constantly renewed as we study God's Word (**1 Peter 2:2; Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8**)
- we should be getting rid of those old sinful attitudes and actions that are contrary to God's Will (**Hebrews 12:1**), and,
- we should be growing and maturing in those attitudes and actions that are godly (**Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 3:12-15**).

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**Point:** If we are striving to live faithfully, endeavouring to live a life that is pleasing to the Father, then we are continually cleansed of our sins. Whenever our time here on earth is ended, He will take us just as we are (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 2 Peter 1:5-11**).

For those who choose to live the way of the world, there is no such promise, no such hope (**Romans 8:5-8**).

### **Conclusion:**

God does accept people “*just the way they are*” at the time that they obey the gospel, and at any time after that while they continue to live faithful lives.

But God accepting us “*just the way we are*” should never be used to justify wilfully living in sin - **Titus 2:11-14**.