

# **Sermon: God's Accepting Family**

**Text: Romans 15:7 ESV**

Gary L. Wackler

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**Romans 15:7 ESV** <sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

The word *welcome(d)* is a translation of a Greek word (προσλαμβάνω) that literally means “to take to oneself.”

**Introduction:** We never want to accept what is clearly defined in the Bible as **not** a Christian lifestyle, but we must love and accept sinners and work to help them better know Jesus. Starting back at **Romans 14:2** we hear argument about how the strong and weak Christians ought to relate to each other. This acceptance of others has been modeled by Christ himself. We need to live our lives for God, and every relationship should be to His glory and praise (Dunn, p. 846).

Everyone wants to be accepted and feel like they belong. What would you do to fit in, to be a part of “the group?” There is nothing wrong with wanting to be accepted or even popular as long as it does not turn into a game of winners and losers. Some people will do almost anything to be in the “in” group.

It is bad when friends or peers become stepping stones, when people get used and individual rights are valued over that of others and the unity of the group.

It is wrong when what is “right” gets sacrificed in order to be popular. When you compromise (violate your conscience) to fit in, you need to step back and look at what you are really giving up.

It is wrong when others get pushed out to make room for you. A close group of friends doesn't have to be a “closed” group.

You should always be able to “be yourself” with friends. True friends always accept you just the way you are, and so does God.

The Church should be a safe and accepting place for everyone. It should be an inclusive community for those who are trying to please God.

The Head of the Church knew what it meant to be not welcomed. **John 1:10-11**  
**The Message** - He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn't even notice. He came to his own people, but they didn't want him.

You ever feel invisible? I know I have felt that way visiting other churches (Brooksville), but can you even imagine how Jesus must have felt after all he had done for the creation. Would they accept Him later when he would give His life for them?

God knows what it feels like to be unnoticed and even rejected. He does not want His creation and certainly not the Church to provide those same feelings of alienation and isolation.

Here are some principles you must understand:

1. God's Word and its authority in our lives must be accepted.
2. Discipline must be accepted if we are ever to grow in our faith.

“God loves us the way we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way.”

Leighton Ford

We need to accept people who are:

### I. **Weak** (Spiritually)

How should the more mature relate to those who are spiritually weaker? Certainly, not with condescension... looking down on someone rarely helps improve them!

“Away with those who want an entirely pure church! That is plainly the same thing as wanting no church at all.”

- Martin Luther

You will never find a perfect church from a human perspective. And if you do, don't join it, because you will ruin it.

It is natural for us to want to help ourselves, but not others. In fact we say: “God helps those who help themselves.” But if we are to be like Christ, we must bear the problems and weaknesses of others until their faith is stronger. We must help carry one another's burdens. **Galatians 6:1-5 ESV** <sup>1</sup> Brothers (and sisters) if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.

**Illus.** All of us were babies once. It took time to learn how to crawl, stand, and walk. Many people still recognize this progression as important. It is called “patterning.” It also took time to adjust to solid food.

A healthy family will do whatever is best for another member - even if that would mean sacrifice and not getting everything you needed. The function of family is to build up and encourage using the gifts God has given us.

Christ is always the model for bearing with the failings of the weak. **Romans 15:1 ESV** <sup>1</sup> We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

This word that is used to describe “to bear” with the failings of the weak is the same word used of Jesus as he bore (βασταζειν) the cross.

William Barclay reminds us that the Christian family should be known for its toleration. “It is not the toleration which tolerates because it is too lazy to do anything else. It is the toleration which knows that a man may be won much more easily to a fuller faith by surrounding him in an atmosphere of love than by attacking him with a battery of criticism.”

“Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.” - Thomas a Kempis

We need to accept people who are:

## **II. Difficult to Love**

You and I are, of course, the exception. We are easy to love. Right?

Because of racial, social or economic prejudice (see James’ epistle) some seem difficult to love. One of the most segregated hours is corporate worship on Sunday morning in our churches. If you take a look at our churches, they look alike many times. There is not the diversity in our assemblies as what might have been the case in the early churches.

**Illus.** A few years ago a group called Faith Ministries Baptist Church in Midland, MI moved into their new worship facility. I was excited for them. I knew how they felt, but it is sad when we have to have “black churches” and “white churches.”

**[Proclaim FM introduction to a black young lady - We were introduced further and the next person did not say no, they just quit talking...]**

In different towns there are churches that are thought to be “money churches,” or there might be a church that is full of the socially/culturally elite. It is where we might expect to see the wealthy and social high-class or the upwardly mobile. The poor might be uncomfortable there. Many times though the problem of prejudice exists just as much in the minds of the poor or the minority as these other groups. Any group can develop an “attitude.” Our love for Jesus ought to be enough to keep us together rather than separate us.

Everyone should be welcome here. Some churches dress down not so much to accommodate those who do not always have nice clothes, but because they want to be comfortable. And they want everyone to feel welcome and accepted there as well.

If you are a graduate from a seminary or did not finish high school you are welcome here. If your annual income is \$20K or \$200K, you may sit wherever you want. But of course, it goes without saying that the best seats are UPFRONT! Black or white or any other color of skinned-person is always welcome in God’s house of worship. All of us are the same in God’s eyes. We are all trying to go to heaven by being faithful to the grace that has been extended to ALL OF US.

Jesus breaks down all barriers. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave or free, male or female because we are all one in Christ Jesus. The only barrier between God and humankind is SIN, and Jesus Christ has done away with the penalty for sin once for all by dying on the cross for us.

No one needs to die while still in his sin. Jesus Christ has forever bridged that gap and created a NEW FAMILY for those who will put their faith in Him.

We need to accept people who are:

### **III. Just Like Us - Sinners**

The model is Christ. How does He accept us? Right where we are is where He meets us! While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (the ungodly). He was God’s perfect SERVANT.

**Romans 5:6-8 ESV** <sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**I do not deserve God's favor any more or less than you. I am a servant just like you. He has called us all to accept others on the same basis as He has accepted us - totally and completely, and without merit.**

**When Jesus came to earth, He was rejected because of His righteousness by the religious community. At the least, there was professional jealousy. Pharisees and others were more impressed by position and appearance than actually serving God and His people. These religious leaders felt threatened by Jesus' consistent love for others and His unconventional style. They were jealous of the attention Jesus received.**

**We are different than Jesus. We are sinners through and through. We do not even always treat well those we love, let alone those we have learned to dislike. Having the Holy Spirit is the only thing that marks us as different. It is only with God's help and grace we can love and be patient and kind with one another.**

**Conclusion:** Acceptance provides for our unity and makes it possible for us to praise God together. It also helps us give a positive example of family to the community. When we meet together to worship and take the Lord's Supper together, it serves as a witness for our soon and sudden-coming Lord.

### **II Corinthians 6:17-18 ESV (quoting Isaiah)**

**17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."**

**The Church is not some mystical family (just a religious idea), but a very real and tangible group. Family takes place openly for the entire world to see. Listen to the prophet Ezekiel: **Ezekiel 20:41 ESV** 41 As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations.**

**Grace is required to be a part of God's family, and acceptance of grace is sometimes very difficult, but it is necessary all the same.**

## **In “The Whisper Test,” Mary Ann Bird writes:**

**I grew up knowing I was different and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech.**

**When schoolmates asked, “What happened to your lip?” I’d tell them I’d fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.**

**There was, however, a teacher in the second grade whom we all adored - Mrs. Leonard was her name. She was short, round, happy - a sparkling lady.**

**Annually, we had a hearing test...Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in the class, and finally it was my turn. I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something, and we would repeat it back - things like “The sky is blue” or “Do you have new shoes?” I waited there for those words that God must have put in her mouth, those seven words that changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said, in her whisper, “I wish you were my little girl.”**

**God says to every person deformed by sin, “I wish you were my child.”**

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**As you know, Romans 15 ends in a benediction - a word of blessing. Again, may I speak them over you this morning?**

**Romans 15:13 ESV <sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**