

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Romans 15:7-29 “What Does It Mean to Accept One Another?”

We are in the closing section of the book of Romans and Paul was offering the Christians some parting advice. He said in Romans 15:7, “*Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.*” This has to be one of the greatest tests a Christian can be asked to do. This is because we all come from so many different backgrounds and are so different in so many ways.

- The black woman in the South comes from a different background than the Asian man in the Northwest.
- The white country farmer from the Midwest comes from a completely different background than the New York cab driver.
- The female African refugee sees the world differently from the young man with a skateboard from California.
- The rich white female grad from Harvard likely has little in common to the poor, male, migrant worker from Texas.
- The desperate ISIS killer from Syria likely shares little with the Hispanic nurse at the hospital.

The great variance of who people are and where they come from largely leads to pre-judging and conflict while in the world. But Paul is not writing to the world, but to the church. In the body of Christ, we are to be accepting to one another. This is regardless of whether we are male, female, Jew, Gentile, bond nor free, for we are all one in Christ! (Galatians 3:28)

It is easy to say “be accepting of one another” rather than actually carrying it out. Paul knew this better than any of the workers of Christ, for he reached out to everyone, from the souls of Arabia all the way to Spain. Imagine the differences in the cultures where he brought the gospel. He had been accepting of others just like Christ was accepting of others.

In order for us to be accepting of others in the church, Paul recommends five areas to focus on. They are as follows.

1) Being accepting of others means accepting a common praise to God.

Romans 15:8-13, “*For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,* ⁹ *and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, ‘THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.’* ¹⁰ *Again he says, ‘REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.’* ¹¹ *And again, ‘PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.’* ¹² *Again Isaiah says, ‘THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.’* ¹³ *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Paul was making reference to the goal of offering a common praise to the Father. It was not limited to the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. We must remember that was the biggest problem plaguing the Roman church, for they were at odds against each other. To prove to the Jewish converts that God desires the praise of the Gentiles, he carried out the standard of Romans 15:4. The things which were prior written in the scriptures led to hope. To emphasize that, Paul quoted four different passages from the Old Testament to prove that God has a

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common goal of praise from both Jewish and Gentile Christians. The passages are Psalm 18:50, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10. Through those four passages Paul proved that it is God's will for all men and women to offer their best praise unto Him.

- David understood this. Psalm 148:1-5, "*Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!* ² *Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!* ³ *Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!* ⁴ *Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens!* ⁵ *Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created.*"
- Paul understood this. He told us in Philippians 1:11 to have the goal of being filled "*with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*"
- John understood this. Revelation 19:5, "*Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.*"
- The late Francis Jane Crosby understood this. She wrote in her hymn in 1869 that we have a common praise to God.

Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!
Sing, O Earth, His wonderful love proclaim!
Hail Him! Hail Him! Highest archangels in glory;
Strength and honor give to His holy Name!
Like a shepherd, Jesus will guard His children,
In His arms He carries them all day long.

Praise Him! Praise Him! Tell of His excellent greatness;
Praise Him! Praise Him! Ever in joyful song!

The question remains, do we accept the fact that we have a common praise unto God? If we are ever going to be accepting of one another, it begins with the common ingredient of praise to God regardless of our background.

2) Being accepting of others means accepting the good in others.

Romans 15:14-16, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Even though the church in Rome had some serious problems, Paul still was able to see the goodness of the Christians thereof. He saw they were "*full of goodness*", being more than able to challenge each other to be even better. They shared the covenant of Christ and that was the basis of their goodness.

One of the greatest hindrances to accepting one another is when we fail to see the good in someone else. Usually it is because we cannot take our minds off of the things that we don't

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appreciate one another. Maybe it is the way someone else worships differently than us. Maybe it is the way they carry themselves in the presence of the brethren. We can all find unappreciated differences among ourselves and it will only lead to not “*accepting one another*”. If we fail to get past that mindset, then we will never be accepting of others in the church.

Have we forgotten that Peter referred to the church in 1 Peter 2:9-10 as “...*A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION?*” This is not saying that we overlook sin in the body, but that we must be willing to see the good qualities in our brothers and sisters in Christ if we are ever going to help each other in our weaknesses. Being accepting of one another means being able to see the good in our fellow saint.

3) Being accepting of others means accepting the power of a common gospel.

Romans 15:17-21, “*Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.* ¹⁸ *For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,* ¹⁹ *in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.* ²⁰ *And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation;* ²¹ *but as it is written, ‘THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND.’”*

Paul said that his gospel did not come by words only, but also with power. What was that power? First of all it was the power of the Holy Spirit which backed up the words which Paul spoke (Mark 16:20). Secondly it was the power of the message of hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Romans 1:5, 15-16).

This has to be the greatest way to accept others in the church, for we share a powerful, common gospel. We all had to see ourselves as sinners before God. We all had to hear the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We all had to accept the hope of Christ. We all had to make ourselves in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection at baptism. We all need to live a faithful life to God. Being accepting of others means accepting the power of a common gospel.

4) Being accepting of others means accepting a common sacrifice.

Romans 15:22-29, “*For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you;* ²³ *but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you* ²⁴ *whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—* ²⁵ *but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.* ²⁶ *For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.* ²⁷ *Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.* ²⁸ *Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.* ²⁹ *I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.”*

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Paul is talking about sacrifice in this passage. There were two sacrifices which were made reference to.

- 1) The sacrifice of fellowship. Paul was making an effort to travel all the way to Rome with the intention of spending time with the Roman Christians. He said in Romans 1:11, “*For I long to see you...*” indicating a deep passion of sacrifice for fellowship. Think about it, he would have traveled several hundreds of miles by foot and ship, through difficult times and at great cost. He would suffer hunger and thirst, the heat and the cold, sickness, wild animals and wild people along the way.
- 2) The sacrifice of giving. He was taking up a collection for the struggling saints of Jerusalem. Gentiles were being asked to sacrifice to the same brethren who often offered a cold shoulder to them. Yet they were willing to give of their funds in the time of need.

Both sacrifices were used as a demonstration of showing acceptance for one another. We have the same test set before us in the church today. We are being asked to take time out of our hectic schedule for the sake of the kingdom. We brave the cold in the winter to fellowship. Some people come from a long distance, burning much fuel and time just to spend moments of fellowship together. Think about all the time we carve out of our schedule in small group studies, worship services, classes, youth events and ministries.

Also think about all the monetary sacrifices you have made in your Christian walk. There are many great needs in the Lord’s missions which you have contributed to and you joyfully do so. Being accepting of others means accepting a common sacrifice.

5) Being accepting of others means accepting the power of prayer.

Romans 15:30-33, “Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,³¹ that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;³² so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.³³ Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”

Paul mentioned the Romans Christians strove together in prayer for him. They prayed for Paul to be delivered from the angry, rebellious souls of Judea. They prayed that Paul’s service to the Lord would be faithful. They prayed for Paul’s travels to Rome would come about. They were directly connected to the apostle through their common prayers for in the life of Paul.

Communal prayer offered by the saints is a great way to show acceptance. We can do it at any time and at any place. When a group of Christians come together for the purpose of a common prayer, they demonstrate a great acceptance of one another. They become prayer warriors, fighting against the forces of evil in this world and empowering the works of the kingdom in their lives.

Why do we not do this more often? Do we doubt the power of prayer? Do we doubt God’s ability to answer our prayers? Are we afraid that we might draw closer to others? Prayer among the saints is the most intimate time we can spend together. To me it is the one of the greatest ways to show that we accept one another.

Conclusion: We must show acceptance to one another. Paul emphasized five ways to do it. What would happen in the church if only we took that path on a daily basis? Let’s find out!