

Accept One Another  
Romans 15:7

This is a playground. It's a place where neighborhood kids test their skills on the various apparatuses that are typically found there. They also test the nerves of their parents. They climb or twirl or swing. If your neighborhood didn't have one at a local park, parents carted their children to the local elementary school.

We went down the slide head first or backwards or sometimes standing in sock feet. We never went down the slide when it was 90 degrees outside. Metal slides were hot enough to cook an egg or burn a bare leg.

The swings were for testing how high you could go. It was the goal to have the swing go as high as the cross bar hoping the chain wouldn't break. Other times we competed with our friends to see who could jump the farthest from the swing. At other times if those on the other swings were in agreement you could get the row of swings going side to side.

Playgrounds are places where kids come together to play and interact with other kids. It's a time of physical and social development. It's also a place where moms can connect. They schedule play dates for their kids and maybe take a little picnic. While the kids are enjoying some physical activity, moms talk about the latest sale or how the tomato plants are doing or compare childhood development. It's a place where people in the neighborhood come together and feel connected with each other.

The playground is a place where everyone should feel welcome and accepted. What better place than the playground to observe the joy and laughter of kids who are running around having a great time.

But what happens when a very happy, loving special needs child comes along to join in on the

fun? What happens when she tries to connect with the other kids? What happens when she can't talk like them or run like them? Parents get irritated and decide it's time to go home.

This is Kati and that's what happened to Tammy a week ago when she took Kati to the playground. She posted on Facebook their experience. Here she is swinging alone. Tammy wrote that if you want to clear out a playground, take a special needs child who is happy, wait 5 minutes and see the dirty looks because she is happy and playing but can't talk like their kids and then everyone leaves. All of a sudden play time for everyone else is over and they exit.

I'm sorry that happened.

I'm sorry that it happens at all.

But unfortunately it's all too familiar. It doesn't have to be a special needs child. It could be someone who doesn't have the best social skills or hygiene or looks or dress. Kids pick it up from their parents who teach by actions and attitudes what is acceptable or not.

It happens all too often, even in churches.

The one another principle we are considering this morning is found in Romans 15:7. Turn there.

Here it is: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

#### I. OUR EXHORTATION – v. 7a

It bears repeating from time to time. These one another principles are admonitions to Christians. It is how we are to treat one another who are in the family of God. It's the expectation God has for us in how we act toward one another and there are three reasons. The first reason is that how we treat one another is a witness to those who are not Christian. The second reason is that when we treat each other as God intended then He is glorified. We saw that last week and we'll see it again today. The third reason is because it's a command.

Now I want to reassure you that my intent in sharing the experience Tammy and Kati had at the playground is not meant to be any kind of reprimand for you. I don't want you to get the impression that we need to do a better job of accepting her because she has special needs. You are a very loving and accepting fellowship. My intent is to illustrate how easy it is to identify someone who is different from us and make a conscious decision that they don't belong, that they would be better served somewhere else.

This is Tony Evans. He's the pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Church. He was one of the first African-Americans to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. Settling into the routine of seminary, he and his wife attended a well-known Bible teaching church in the Dallas area. A deacon from that church quietly but deliberately escorted them to the door and told them they were not welcome in that church.

They found their way to Fellowship Bible Church of Dallas where the pastor, Gene Getz, had just taught a series on the one another passages. Tony Evans later shared with the pastor that his church was the first all-white Bible teaching church in the Dallas area where they felt welcomed.

When you hear the word acceptance, what does that word mean to you? The dictionary defines it as something we take or receive favorably, to approve.

On one end I find it to mean taking something even though it may not be what I want or expect.

We find ourselves interviewing for a new job with another company. We like them and they like us. Now it's time to negotiate for pay and perks. We have a salary range in mind with some additional benefits we think should come with the position. We present our request and they counter with something less. It's presented as a "take it or leave it" kind of deal, so even though we wanted more,

we accept the offer because we really like the company and the position.

We go to the store to buy a new refrigerator. They have a number of models you really like but they are too expensive, but they have the same model with hundreds of dollars knocked off the original price because it is in the scratch and dent sale area. Even though there are some minor dings you accept the purchase because it is much cheaper.

Acceptance in that respect suggests settling for second best. How would you like to be a bride or groom standing at the altar saying your vows and the other person saying "even though you aren't my first choice I'll accept you for richer or poorer, for better for worse and so on because I don't have any other offers right now.

Its use in the Bible is something entirely different. Let me return to the dictionary definition and key in on an important component of the definition – it is the idea of receiving something or someone favorably.

Here's how a Bible dictionary defines acceptance as its used here in Romans 15:7 – "To take to one's self, to grant one access to one's heart, to take into friendship." It implies receiving with a warm welcome. It's received heartily.

Think for a moment about the relationship between Jonathan and David. It could have gone south fast when it was understood by Jonathan that David was going to succeed his dad as King. Jealousy, resentment, and bitterness could have welled up in Jonathan just as it did in Saul, but he didn't let it. Instead he continued to accept David as his very trusted friend. He accepted him warmly.

Let's again consider the context of this admonition. Look back at 14:1 where we see the same word. Romans 14:1

Here the exhortation is for the strong in the faith to accept the weak in the faith. They were to do so without passing judgment on disputable matters. We might say that they weren't to be prejudiced. In this case it had to do with what was eaten. In the Roman culture before meat was sold in the market it was offered as a sacrifice to their pagan gods. Then it was put on the market. Some believers new to the faith thought that since it had been offered to idols they shouldn't eat it. To them it brought back memories of their days worshipping pagan gods and didn't want to leave the impression that they were still following that practice. For that reason those who were weaker faith thought no Christian should eat meat sold in the market. They looked down on those who did. More mature Christians didn't have a problem with it, but the weaker Christians were offended by it. Paul instructed the more mature, because they were more mature to accept the weaker Christian and not pass judgment on them. Instead they were encouraged to help these newer believers grow in the faith, being mindful not to lead them into something that would make them feel guilty.

Where we get into trouble is when we make our preferences the standard by which someone should live instead of what God's Word actually says. Paul went on to clarify that everything is okay to eat, but don't let that be the sticking point by which we accept someone or not.

I don't prefer coffee but I will never insist on Biblical grounds that if you drink coffee you're not a good Christian. I still kiss my wife even though she has coffee breath.

It can be so easy to accept others based on any number of factors.  
 They aren't the same skin color.  
 They aren't the same socio-economic background.  
 They don't dress like us.  
 If they look like us, smell like us, talk like us, act like us then we'll accept them. Otherwise, we'll

quietly but deliberately escort them out the door.

I'm guessing the name Lacrae isn't familiar to most of you. He is a Contemporary Christian musician. Before coming to Christ he suffered child abuse, was hooked on drugs and alcohol, spent time in rehab, got a woman pregnant that ended in an abortion and attempted suicide. We might look at someone like that and not accept him or her because of those lifestyle choices. Even after being saved.

John MacArthur writes a word of warning to consider. "Failure to accept one another in love and compassion is an affront to the Savior who accepted us. A congregation that is divisive, quarrelsome, contentious, and judgmental gives the world reason to ridicule Christ's church and to reject the One who is their only hope of salvation."

James provides a very clear message for us about acceptance.

James 2:1-4

James calls partiality or prejudice a violation of God's law. Are they not just as much a part of the body of Christ as you and I? Of course they are. So how can we say to them you don't belong, we don't need you. You can't be part of our group.

In Proverbs 24:23 we read "To show partiality is not good."

Peter confessed to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10:35 that he had shown partiality against Gentiles.

Romans 2:11 "There is no partiality with God."

James writes in the emphatic position giving special force to his admonition not to have an attitude of partiality or favoritism. That attitude has no part in the life of a growing Christian. Notice in verse 9 of James 2 how such an attitude is classified.

“But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.”

Folks, that’s a serious indictment. It’s sin.

“An attitude of personal favoritism” is one long word in the Greek. It literally means lifting up someone’s face, with the idea of judging by appearance and then giving that person special treatment because of our assessment. We might show partiality because of their status, or their ability, or their pocketbook or their personality.

Nathanael judged Jesus because He was from Nazareth. Nazareth was a town that had a poor reputation. If I tell people I’m from Flint they have one opinion of me. If I tell people I’m from Grand Blanc it’s entirely different.

The Pharisees judged Jesus because He hung out with prostitutes and tax collectors.

The exhortation of Paul is a command that is to be continuous. Keep on accepting one another.

Before we move on I want to mention that the word is also used in Philemon.

Philemon 12, 17

“Whom I have sent again; you, therefore, receive him, that is, my own heart...If you count me, therefore, a partner, receive him as myself.”

Onesimus was a runaway slave. Somehow he met Paul in prison and through the course of time was saved. Paul was sending him back to his master, Philemon. In the letter he describes Onesimus as a valuable slave to Philemon. He wanted to keep him there with him but the right thing was to send him back to his rightful owner. He ends by telling Philemon to welcome him back with open arms the same way he would welcome the Apostle.

John couches it a little differently when he asks a rhetorical question. How can we say we love God

and yet hate our brother? Not accepting someone is the softer way or the PC form of hating them. If we love God as we say we do then we are to love one another in the same way which means we will accept them.

We are exhorted by Paul to accept one another. We are to receive one another in love without reservation or judgment. I want to make it clear that the exhortation in verse 7 is for all Christians regardless of where we are in our spiritual journey.

Our verse continues by showing us our example.

## II. OUR EXAMPLE – v. 7b

Of course the best example we can consider of accepting others is Christ. But then you might ask yourself ‘how has Christ received us?’ Or you might ask, as some people believe, if He is Christ isn’t He supposed to receive and welcome everyone? Won’t everyone be welcomed in heaven?

Romans 5:1-10

If we ever get to the point of thinking we are something special as the reason why the Lord accepted us turn back to this passage and read it a few times. It has a way of knocking us off our pedestal.

In verse 6 Christ accepted us when we were weak. That doesn’t mean physically, but spiritually. We had no power to save ourselves.

In verse 6 Christ accepted us when we were ungodly.

Isaiah 64:6 – “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

Romans 3:10 – “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.”

Romans 3:23 – “Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us.” (The Message)

Isaiah 53:6 - We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on Him.” (The Message)

Christ accepted us even thou we were ungodly.

In verse 8 Christ accepted us when we were still sinners.

In verse 10 Christ accepted us when we were His enemies.

That's me. “I wouldn't want me”, but Christ did. So here's the thing, if Christ accepted us under those conditions without asking us to get cleaned up first, why is it we put conditions on people before we accept them?

Let's take a page from the example of Christ. John Phillip writes “Christ has received us. With all our foibles and failures; with all our weaknesses and wickedness; with all our lack of loveliness, defects of character and spiritual infirmities, He has received us. How can we close the doors of fellowship to someone else who is genuinely saved but who has different problems? The spirit of Christ demands that we extend to all believers the hospitality of the Lord's Table and the warmth of the local fellowship.”

III John 9-10

How is Christ our example?  
How has Christ received us?

In Luke 15:1-2 the Pharisees had a scathing report against Jesus, but in reality it was a wonderful affirmation of the heart of Jesus and testimony to

the world. “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

And we shout, yes, that's right, that's who He is and I'm so glad He accepted sinners. So how has Christ accepted us?

1. Christ has accepted us joyously.  
Luke 15:3-7

2. Christ has accepted us in spite of our sin.  
Otherwise no one could be saved.

I Timothy 1:15 “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”

Matthew 9:10-13

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Erdmann Neumeister wrote the following song:

Christ Receiveth Sinful Men

Sinners Jesus will receive;  
Sound this word of grace to all  
Who the heavenly pathway leave,  
All who linger, all who fall.

*Sing it o'er and over again;  
Christ receiveth sinful men;  
Make the message clear and plain:  
Christ receiveth sinful men.*

Come, and He will give you rest;  
Trust Him, for His Word is plain;  
He will take the sinfulest;  
Christ receiveth sinful men.

Now my heart condemns me not,  
Pure before the law I stand;  
He who cleansed me from all spot,  
Satisfied its last demand.



Christ receiveth sinful men,  
Even me with all my sin;  
Purged from every spot and stain,  
Heaven with Him I enter in.

If you have not yet been welcomed by Christ He is waiting to receive just as you are.

3. Christ has accepted us impartially.

John 6:37 “All the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.”

Acts 10:34-35 “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.’”

4. Christ has accepted us to the glory of God.

“Ephesians 3:20-21 “Now to Him who is able to immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Philippians 2:9-11 “Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Christ accepts us so that God can be glorified. We are to follow the example of Christ who has accepted us unconditionally and accept one another. Why? We find the answer in the end of our verse.

### III. OUR EXALTATION – v. 7c

Not only does Christ bring glory to God by accepting us, we bring glory to God by accepting one another. Everything is to be done with the view of bringing God glory. When there is a lack of

acceptance within the body then God is not glorified and we are sinning against Him and against the one we don't accept.

Let me repeat an earlier quote from John MacArthur. “Failure to accept one another in love and compassion is an affront to the Savior who accepted us (and) gives the world reason to ridicule Christ's church and to reject the One who is their only hope of salvation.”

Here's our church. Oh it looks a little different on the outside. We've added shrubs and different light poles. It's changed little on the outside. My prayer is that when people look on the inside they see something quite unique, special. My prayer is that they see acceptance of one another, acceptance that brings God glory.

We all have a deep inner desire to be accepted, to have authentic relationships that are growing and nurturing.

Dr. Larry Crabb in his book *Connecting* writes “What every Christian can pour into another is the powerful passion of acceptance, a passion that flows out of the center of the gospel, a passion that fills the heart of God.”

Our acceptance of one another begins first with our being accepted by Christ. When we remember how He has accepted us, then, well, let's make sure we stick around the playground.

It would be a wise use of our time to evaluate our attitudes toward others and ensure that we accept one another as Christ has accepted us. If we find in our time of reflection that we do have a preferential treatment of some over others then we must repent and begin to accept them as we have been accepted by Christ. Then God will be glorified.