



“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).

The Ministry of Acceptance

Central Truth: Accept all people in the spirit of Christ.

L176. Date: January 1995. **Text:** John 8:3-11; Romans 15:5-7.

Topic: Sin: Of Men.

Having ministered in thirty-four nations, I have seen people of many different cultures, languages, races, lifestyles, and religions. But I have never seen a person whom God does not love. I have never seen a person for whom Jesus did not die. I have never seen a person who was beyond the reach of God's grace. I have never seen a person whom I should reject because of national, racial, or cultural differences. I have learned by experience that “*God is no respecter of persons*” (Acts 10:34).

People whom I do not “like” I can “love” with the love of God. Those with whom I do not choose to develop close social intimacy I can welcome to my church to be instructed in the things of God. People whose lifestyle would cause me to reject them will be received when God's grace is brought into view.

Here is the principle we Christians must follow: We must accept anyone whom Jesus would accept, and reject only those whom He would reject. To do anything other than that is to deny our relationship with Him who is our Savior and Lord.

Jesus Accepts Sinners (John 8:3-11)

An accusation against Jesus was, “*This man receiveth sinners*” (Luke 15:2). Those who accused Him so did not realize what a compliment they were giving Him. He came “*to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). John 8:3-11 gives a case study of how Jesus received sinners and

how He dealt with them. A review of that incident will guide us in our ministry of acceptance.

Jesus accepts sinners whose guilt is confirmed (verse 4). The Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery. (One wonders, “Where was the man who was with her?”) There was no question of her guilt. That was not a little “affair” which could be overlooked. God was very specific in the commandment, “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14). She was guilty of willful disobedience to the known law of God. She was “as guilty as sin.”

The Bible warns against willful sin. “*If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*” (Hebrews 10:26). What will Jesus do with an adulteress who is unquestionably guilty?

Jesus accepts sinners whose sentence is severe (verse 5). God's law says of adultery, “*The man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, . . . the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death*” (Leviticus 20:10). God left no other alternative. (Note that adultery was not a reason for divorce; it was punished by execution!) The Pharisees challenged Jesus as to whether or not the woman should be stoned to death. Jesus was in a difficult place. To say she should not be killed was to oppose the law of Moses and discredit Him. To say she should be killed was to usurp the authority of the Roman occupation forces in Palestine and be subject to arrest. The Pharisees were not really concerned about the woman. (The Jews had not killed people for adultery for generations.) They wanted to trap Jesus, and it appeared that the trap was well set.

Jesus receives sinners whose accusers are insistent (verses 6, 7). The poor woman was put on public display, and her sin was announced to all. (A crowd had gathered around Jesus as He taught in the temple at the time the woman was brought and accused publicly.) No one seemed to care about her embarrassment. Her accusers were intent only on trapping Jesus.

Jesus stooped and wrote in the sand, as if He did not hear the charge against her. The accusers were insistent, however. They kept on saying, “Moses said she should be stoned. What do you say?” They would not let Him ignore them. Their insistence required that He answer. Have you noticed some people who seem to thrive on the sins of others? They relate the offense over and over to all who will hear. They speak of the punishment which should be meted out. And they will not cease. Perhaps they should hear the little poem: “What are others' faults to me? I've not a vulture's bill/To pick at every fault I see and make it larger still./It is enough for me to know I've follies of my own/And on myself my cares bestow and leave my

friends' alone." Amen!

Jesus receives sinners who are accused by other sinners (verses 7-9). At last Jesus arose from His sand writing and simply stated, "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*" (verse 7}. He turned attention from the guilty woman; He caused each accuser to look into his own heart. He did not have to say whether to stone her or not to stone her. Each accuser felt condemned in his own heart, turned quietly, and walked away. The exit began with the eldest of them and went to the youngest. Not one was left to accuse her.

Does that mean the woman was exonerated? Not at all. She remained before Jesus. Her guilt was not yet reconciled. The guilty consciences of others did not relieve her. The crowd listening to Jesus' teaching was still there. Jesus must deal with her for her sake and for theirs.

Jesus receives sinners and assures their forgiveness (verses 10, 11). "Where are those who accused you?" He asked the adulteress. "Are they no longer here to condemn you?" She replied, "No, Lord." His reply is an amazing revelation of God's grace: "*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*" Glory!

But wait, what about the law of Moses which said that the woman must be executed? Has Jesus violated the law of God? Not at all. "*Mercy rejoiceth against judgment*" (James 2:13). That means mercy triumphs over judgment by removing the condemnation which the law would impose. There is a law which condemns sin, but there is a higher law which forgives sin. (That is how the law of gravity is overcome by the law of aerodynamics so an airplane can fly.) The law of God said judgment would fall upon sin. But when Jesus forgave that woman, there was no sin in her upon which the sentence of death should be executed. "*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven*" (Luke 7:47). "*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*" (I Timothy 1:15). Praise God because He is still saving sinners.

Jesus accepts sinners and reforms their conduct (verse 11). Do not think that Jesus looks lightly upon the sin of sexual immorality. He did not condemn the woman because He forgave her sin. But that was not the end of the account. Hear His instruction to her: "*Go, and sin no more.*" Sin is not forgiven where conduct is not reformed. To be forgiven means "*old things are passed away; . . . all things are become new*" (II Corinthians 5:17).

God makes this requirement "*Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil*" (Isaiah 1:16). To the crippled man whom Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda He gave this solemn command: "*Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse*

thing come unto thee” (John 5:14). Sin is not to reign over the person who has been made free from sin by the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:12).

We Must Accept One Another (Romans 15:5-7)

“Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (verse 7). That single spiritual principle should erase all interpersonal conflicts for the Christian. How did Jesus receive people? He received them on the basis of God's grace. How are we to receive people? We receive them as Jesus did. Romans 14 and 15 deal with theological and social differences between believers. (Pause at this point and read those two chapters, please.) We receive one another in order to help one another. We receive one another without accusation or condemnation. While we do not compromise truth, we do not require that a person be fully mature in the faith to be welcomed into our fellowship. How could we receive a new convert or an immature believer?

We accept one another because of our mutual relationship to Jesus Christ (verse 5). God is patient with us. He dealt with us in grace when we were rebellious and immature. How can we deal any differently with our brothers and sisters in Christ? He encouraged us in spiritual growth. We should assist one another to grow through our encouragement, not our condemnation. Jesus left us an example that we should follow in His steps (I Peter 2:21). Each Christian is in a different stage of spiritual maturity. *“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves”* (Romans 15:1).

We accept one another for one great reason (verse 6). Paul desired that the Romans would *“with one mind and one mouth glorify God.”* That is our goal; it is also the reason we were saved (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14), the reason for our honorable lifestyle (Matthew 5:16), the reason for God's purchase of our bodies and souls, and the reason for the indwelling presence of His Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19, 20). That is the Christian's reason for existence.

Glorifying God *“with one mind and one mouth”* necessitates unity among God's people. A divisive attitude, a critical spirit in personal relations, or a desire to press another down instead of lifting him up will dishonor the name of Christ. Let us make every possible effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Others will see it and glorify God.

We accept one another in the spirit of Christ (verse 7). The early

Christians had great barriers which separated them because the Jew and Gentile believers came from such different backgrounds. Gentiles did not recognize the “holy” days or “clean and unclean” food which was so important to the Jews. Gentile believers looked on Jewish believers as making “much ado about nothing.” Jewish believers considered the Gentile believers to be careless about most holy things. No wonder they were admonished, “*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous*” (I Peter 3:8). Christ received us when we were weak, wrong, and wicked (Romans 5:6, 8, 10); so we must receive the weak brother without any argument about our differences (Romans 14:1). We then assist one another in growing toward Christian maturity.

This is no appeal to compromise principles of doctrine or morality. It is a call to be gracious in dealing with one another. When we accept people in the spirit of Christ, we accept them as they are in order to assist them to become what they can be. How acceptable are you to immature Christian brothers or sisters?

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Jesus receive sinners, even eating with them?
2. How can you show that spirit in dealing with people today?
3. Why did Jesus not join in condemning the immoral woman?
4. What should be your attitude toward such people?
5. How can you minister to sinners without becoming one of them?
6. In what way are all Christians “one” in Christ?
7. How does that unity call us to care for one another?
8. How does Christian unity glorify God?
9. Why should we receive a Christian who is in error because of spiritual immaturity?
10. How can we receive such persons without compromising doctrinal or moral principles?