

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Accept One Another

by Dan Trygg

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for passing judgment on his opinions. ² One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. ³ Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.”

Romans 14:1-3

“Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. ⁸ For Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and so that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles...’”

Romans 15:7-9

“For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for a while, that you should have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷ If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.”

Philemon 1:15-17

We have been examining the twenty-one “one another” ministry responsibilities described in the NT that we are to express toward one another in the Body of Christ. These are given to us to activate us to *all* be actively working to create an environment of love, acceptance and open sharing, so that we can more effectively build one another up when we meet. It is important to keep this in front of our minds. *We* are to come with *our* eyes, ears and hearts open, ... with our “antennae up”, so to speak. We are *not* called out to meet together simply to relax, or “get fed”, or to have a positive experience. We are *not* called out primarily to worship God, or even hear a good teaching. **We are called to meet together to “build one another up”. What does *that* mean? It means to fortify, encourage, motivate, assist, equip, serve and bring the healing grace of Jesus Christ to one another** through the way we interact and speak to one another. Effective ministry happens when we are directed and prompted by the Lord to speak and/or express the reality of what He is doing in us to help one another. **The parts of the Body minister to one another, and the Body as a whole gets built up.** When you read Acts 2:42-47; I Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 3:12-17; Hebrews 3:12,13; 10:23-25; 12:14-17; and I Peter 4:7-11, you can see how incredibly interactive church meetings were. You can also easily see that **the early Christians clearly thought they were *all* to be watching out for one another, helping each other, and speaking into one another’s lives for the purpose of strengthening one another in Christ.** We have wandered far away from the original dynamics God intended for church meetings to have. Most of us have to *push ourselves* to *acknowledge* and *act on* what the Spirit is showing us about one another. We also need to develop the ability to establish deep, honest relationships with people who are otherwise strangers. **It is our common commitment to Christ and His Kingdom that calls us to meet together to do the work of developing one another.** Just as we don’t choose our physical siblings, we do not choose our brothers and sisters in Christ, either. We *do* have to deal with each other, though, if we are going to be obedient to the Father. **That is part of the training regimen, ...learning to get along with our brothers and sisters, even if they can be aggravating at times.** More than learning how to avoid unprofitable conflict, however, **we are also to learn *how* to minister *effectively* to one another.**

The other clear teaching of those passages on interactive Body-life has to do with how often the apostles urged the believers to develop positive, loving relationships with one another. No one wants to share with people who are unwelcoming, harsh, impolite or disrespectful. We are to learn to interact with each other in ways that will encourage people to feel safe and loved. **The starting point of this is to not pre-judge one another, or to look down our noses at each other.** We talked last week of how **Paul encouraged us to “think the same thing” toward one another.** Most of that was about putting aside petty differences, and recognizing that each person is a valuable brother or sister in Christ. **We are not to think of ourselves as “better than” others.** We are to be willing to strip away all those things that the selfish flesh might want to use to keep us at a distance from each other, and **recognize that before God we are all the same, ...sinners saved by grace, ...blood-bought, Spirit-born children of God and joint-heirs together with Christ.** We are on equal footing before God, because of His grace, ...and we are all a work in progress, because of His calling. The other side of this is true, as well. **We are not to think *less* of ourselves than others.** We are blood-bought, Spirit-born children of God, who stand in grace and who are progressing toward a calling from God.

Today’s study moves this one step deeper. Not only are we to view each other as valuable equals, we are to “accept one another”. The Greek word translated as “accept” (*proslambanomai*) literally means to “take to oneself”. The word occurs 12 times in the NT. It was used when Peter took Jesus aside for a private conversation (Matt. 16:22; Mk. 8:32). Aquila and Priscilla did the same with Apollos, with better results. They “took him aside and explained to him the word of God more accurately (Acts 18:26). In Acts 17:5, it was used to describe how the Jews recruited a mob, “and taking to themselves some wicked men of the rabble...”. Twice it was used to refer to the “taking

of food to oneself” (Acts 27:33,36). Later, it was used for the hospitality shown to refugees, as the natives of Malta “took us all in” (Acts 28:2). All the remaining five occurrences of the word are listed in the verses at the top of this study.

Another interesting feature of this word is that it never occurs in either the active or passive voice in the NT. It is always in the middle voice. “What”, you say? The active voice is a label given by linguists to describe when the subject acts, and the force of the action goes somewhere else. For example, “John hit the ball”. John does something, and the action affects something else. The passive voice is when the subject is being acted upon. The force of the action happens to him. For example, “John was hit by the ball”. Here, John is not *doing* the action. Rather, the action happens *to* him. Well, the Greek has a third option. They have what linguists call “the middle voice”. **It means that the subject *does* the action, but he or she is either *intensely involved* in the action, or somehow the action *limits* or *profoundly affects* him.** This gets at another layer of meaning not available in English. We learn something more about the person doing the action, ...that it will somehow cost, limit, or profoundly affect him or her, if she acts in this manner. In the case of hitting the ball, it may describe more clearly the level of effort or concentration required. Or, in the case of *proslambanomai*, it means that when people did this action of “taking to themselves”, they were intensely involved in what they were doing (e.g., Peter talking with Jesus, or the Jews recruiting the mob), or that the action directly affected them (e.g., eating food), or that it cost or limited them in some fashion (e.g., showing hospitality to strangers). In other words, if we are to “accept one another” or “take one another to ourselves” this will entail more than just saying, “Hi”, to each other when we come through the door. What Paul is indicating is that **truly “accepting one another” will mean that we must get involved, we must truly go out of our way to include, welcome and embrace one another. It will require something from us.** It is *not* simply a casual thing. To be genuine, we will be deliberately and intensely involved in opening our hearts to one another. **“Accepting one another” may also mean that we are pushing past our comfort zone. We may be taking some risk,** at some level. We may reach out and be rejected. **It may cost us something.** It may cost time, energy or even resources to truly “take someone to ourselves”.

The “one another” aspect of the phrase indicates that the action is supposed to go *both* directions. We are to be accepted by others, too. **Sometimes, however, others may not respond at the level we are hoping for.** *Someone* has to be the initiator, here. We can’t use the poor response of others as an excuse for *us* to not reach out. **We have to ask, “Why am I doing this?” and “How am I to do this?”** We choose to reach out to accept, include and “take others to ourselves” *out of obedience to God, and from the love and grace He supplies* by His Spirit. If it is reciprocated, great! That makes it much easier to give of ourselves. If we can get an *entire group* of us to value and warmly open our hearts to one another, it can be *wonderful!* If others do not respond well, however, we should not allow *their* self-centeredness or pride defeat *us*. **In the power of the Spirit, we can continue to be gracious, accepting and welcoming, even if they do not wish to “come in from the cold” or accept our invitation** to fellowship with us. **We can do *our* part, but the response of others is up to *them*.**

So, let’s look at the passages for today’s study. In Romans 14, **Paul encourages us to accept one another, even if we do not agree about minor differences.** He uses the example of disagreements about what a person could or should eat. Some had definite scruples about this, whereas others thought it was no big deal. We are to accept one another, regardless. **We are to do so *genuinely*, not just so we can try to change their minds to become like us. That means we don’t keep bringing up the topic we know we don’t agree on.** If it is not an essential doctrine about who Jesus is, or how we are saved, it is probably *not* something we have to deal with *today*. Give people time and room to learn and grow. **Don’t keep bringing up your *pet* issues, ...or even their *problem* issues..., if it causes feelings of superiority or judgment.** We are to *accept* one another, not regard them with contempt or judge them.

In Romans 15, the issue is to **accept one another regardless of background, race or heritage.** In Christ, we have been raised to a new, higher status. We are now part of God’s family, part of a new spiritual humanity that supercedes our past identities. We can be proud of our heritage, because God loves diversity, and we know that there will be representatives from every tribe, tongue, people and nation in God’s eternal Kingdom. We can learn from and celebrate one another’s backgrounds, but we are not to let ethnic pride or past offenses cloud our oneness in Christ.

In the third scenario Paul encouraged Philemon to accept back his former slave. Onesimus had run away, broken the law as well as Philemon’s trust. He had since come to Christ, and was returning to ask for forgiveness and to make amends. Legally, Philemon could demand his death, and would have been “righteous” to do so, in that society. Paul appeals to a higher calling and standard, however, and encourages him to “take Onesimus to himself” as if he were to welcome the apostle Paul himself. He *had been* a useless slave. *Now*, he is a transformed brother in Christ. For Philemon to “accept him” as such could have huge ramifications. For us, the lesson is that **we are to accept even those who have hurt us, when they ask for forgiveness. We are to accept one another *as Christ accepted us*** (Rom. 15:7). This makes God’s love and grace *visible*, and *brings Him glory*. **It may cost us something. Can we put aside our pain, pride and past hurt in order to accept one another?** Are we willing to “bear the cross” for love?