

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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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

God's plan is that we *all* present ourselves together to become a single living sacrifice. As we *individually* choose to embrace God's purpose, we become willing to *work together with other believers* to accomplish what He has in mind for us as a group. In chapter 12, Paul talked about how we are like a body. Each of us has been given unique grace-giftings, abilities energized by the Holy Spirit to enable us to build one another up. We are *all* to 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, motivate, encourage, 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, ...and we actually DO it. The parts of the Body minister to one another, and the Body as a whole gets built up.* When you read the NT from this perspective, you can see how incredibly interactive church meetings were (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 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 to avoid unprofitable conflict, however, we are also to learn *how to minister effectively to one another.*

The other clear teaching of the 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.** In Romans 12:16, 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 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). Paul used this word to admonish Philemon to “accept” Onesimus, the runaway slave, as though he were Paul (Philem. 1:17). The remaining four occurrences in the verses at the top of this study.

An 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 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.

The issues Paul highlights are matters of conscience. Whether it is OK to eat *anything*, or whether we ought to eat vegetables only; ...or whether we ought to observe special “holy days”, or can regard *every day the same*. Clearly, Paul thinks there is freedom here, but **he advises the believers to keep these issues as matters of personal conscience, not debate**, ...and certainly not as a basis to judge another or scorn someone’s scruples. **What matters is what your heart intent is:** Are you doing what you do in order to honor God? Then, by all means, do that! But if another chooses to honor God in a different way, do not judge or ridicule him. **Be fully convinced in your own mind.** We all will answer *to God*, not to other people. God is able to make us stand, because of His grace. So, “stay in your lane.” Keep your relationship with the Lord in good conscience, and allow others the freedom to honor Him in different ways, as long as they do not violate clear teachings of the Scripture. **It is not your job to judge the scruples of another. What IS your responsibility is to “determine not to put a stumbling block or an offense in the way of your brother or sister.”** Don’t encourage them to do something against their conscience. Honor them *and* their scruples.

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 (Eph. 2:13-19). **We are now part of God’s family, part of a new spiritual humanity that supersedes our past identities.** However, we can also 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** (Rev. 5:9,10). 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.**