

The Acceptance of Christ

Romans 15:7-13

Introduction

The year was 1964 – there was no bigger music group in the world than the Beatles - - - they played the Ed Sullivan show in February - - - and went on a 32-date tour in North America — they had a concert scheduled on September 11 of that year in Jacksonville, FL – at the Gator Bowl stadium. Tickets cost \$4- \$5. It was the show that almost did not happen. A hurricane had recently blown thru on September 9-10th and parts of the area were storm damaged. In fact, Ringo's drum set had to be nailed to the stage to keep it from blowing over during the show.

Also – concert promoters informed the band – ahead of time - - that the audience would be racially segregated. No blacks in the white section / vice versa. That's just how we do things in the South. John Lennon spoke out 5 days before the show and said, 'no': 'We never play to segregated audiences and we aren't going to start now.' 'I'd sooner lose our appearance money.' - - - promoters buckled and the audience was de-segregated.

Paul McCartney later reflected in 1966 "We weren't into prejudice," . "We were always keen on mixed-race audiences . . . It wasn't out of any goody-goody thing. We just thought, 'Why should you separate black people from white? That's stupid, isn't it?'"

Apparently, God agrees with that mindset

When Peter welcomed the first Gentiles into the church – he said

Acts 10:34-35 - 'And opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.'

When it comes to the gospel / to the cross - - - we find a God who is color blind – who accepts all who come – not on the basis of race or ethnicity / gender / age / background

The one condition of our acceptance is that we repent and put our trust in Jesus Christ

Galatians 3:28, 29 - 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.'

John 6:37 - ' . . . and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.'

If you come by faith – you're in

Black / White / Jew / Gentile / rich or poor / old or young / the leper / the sick / the healthy and the strong - - - all enter thru the same door

If anyone has a reason to exclude sinners from heaven - - - it is a holy God

But – He graciously welcomes the humble sinner who comes to Him thru faith in the Son

And God now calls us to offer the same acceptance to all in the church – if we gather in the name of Jesus – to worship the risen Savior

Romans 15:7 - 'Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.'

In this section – Paul reminds us of this great acceptance with which we have been welcomed to God thru the work of Christ

At the cross – God put out the welcome sign / threw down the welcome mat

Come all who are thirsty

Come all who are weary

‘Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life’

Paul makes this the basis of Christian acceptance of one another with their various differences in the church

Jews are to accept Gentiles / Gentiles are to accept Jews / black / white - - -rich / poor - - - we are to worship Jesus together in one body – the church

Some day – we will come to the heavenly scene

Revelation 5:9-10 - 'And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.'

I. Accepted by Christ - v. 7

There are many divisions in the world – black / white / Jews / Arabs

In the 1st century – it was the Jews / the Greeks – or Gentiles

The Romans looked down on the non-Romans / giving special legal privileges and protections to those with Roman citizenship status

You had the Jew-Samaritan divide as well

Into that world – came the gospel of Jesus Christ

The church stood out – embracing both Jew and Gentile / Roman and non-Roman

How did such a group manage to get along with one another / worship God together

They came together at the cross

John MacArthur: 'Failure to accept one another in love and compassion is an affront to the Savior who accepted us.'

That is our calling

If a holy God could find room in His heart to accept us – back into fellowship with Himself – to listen to our prayers / give us His Holy Spirit to guide us / to forgive us of our sins - - - we can find room in our hearts to accept one another

James spoke of this – in the context of the rich and the poor

In the 1st century – there was not much of a middle class – like we have in America

James 2:1-4 - 'My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?'

Let's imagine a celebrity coming to a church

Let's say Caitlin Clark and Sophie Cunningham come to church

We want to greet them / take a selfie / here - - - sign my shirt / etc.

Let's say a garbage man also comes to church that day - - - or a person on govt. assisted housing - - - we don't have time for him

We don't give him the time of day

Why is that? They are both people made in the image of God

C.S. Lewis: "It is a serious thing . . . to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw

it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations . . . immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." [Weight of Glory]

James [in his little parable] reduces it to a failure to love one's neighbor

James 2:8, 9 - 'If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin . . .'

Sidney Poitier was the first black man to win the Academy Award for best actor

On one occasion in 1955 – in Atlanta he stopped at an upscale restaurant for a bite to eat – and was told that the only way he could get a table – was if they put a screen around him – so that others would not see him dining with the white customers

That was be the condition of his 'acceptance' in that establishment

We don't want to see you / or have others have to acknowledge you / even know you are here

In the church – we want to see people / we want to encourage them / ask them how they are doing / we want to pray for them / talk to them - - - that is how we accept one another

Some people have porcupine personalities - - - 'don't get too close!' - - - watch it
Other people are like a big fuzzy teddy bear – easy to talk to / etc.

We accept them all

*** How did Christ accept us?

He accepted us with our baggage / our weaknesses / our sicknesses / etc.

He reached out and touched the leper

He accepted us without regard to who we are / what we have done / what color of skin / how much status or wealth / etc.

We can see the logical flow of Paul's thought – he began in 14:1 – with 'accept him' [the weaker brother] – and now concludes with 'accept one another'

Everything in between has been to support this instruction

Paul says that such acceptance is the logical outflow of the cross

Welcome others into our fellowship because Christ welcomed us into heaven

We can't just come any old way – heaven is a black-tie event – where God supplies the tie

In the parable of the wedding feast [Matthew 22] - - - the king gave a wedding feast for his son – and sent out the invitations - - - and some turned the king down

The king sent out his servants – tell them the feast is ready - - - but one went to his farm / the other to his business / some of them even killed some of the king's servants

Then the king tells his servants – go out into the highways and invite others who were not originally invited

It's a clear reference to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church

Matthew 22:11-14 - "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless. "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

What are the wedding clothes?

It's to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ

Galatians 3:27 - 'For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.'

If anyone has a valid reason to exclude others – it is God in His holiness

We do not believe in universalism where God accepts everyone willy-nilly

Natural man is a sinner hostile to God / has made himself an enemy to God – he is in trouble with God

C.S. Lewis: 'fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.'

Some will be excluded from God and His heaven for all eternity in a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth - - - we must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ

The key to acceptance with God is humble faith – 'God be merciful to me the sinner.'

Luke 18:10-12 - 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Luke 18:13 - 'But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

Luke 18:14 - 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.'

God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble

I Peter 5:5 - '. . . all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble."

It's the devil who puffs up / who promotes hatred and division

It's the devil who sows discord among brothers

The gospel produces humility and grace in our hearts

II. Jew and Gentile - vv. 8-12

Here Paul supports his argument with a few quotations from the OT

Douglas Moo: 'Paul cites every part of the Old Testament - the writings (vv. 9b, 11), the Law (v. 10) and the prophets (v. 12) to show that inclusion of *Gentiles* with Jews in the praise of God has always been part of God's purposes.'

There is a progression in the texts which Paul cites

The progression of quotes:

- The Jews glorify God among the Gentiles – v. 9
- The Gentiles rejoice with the Jews – v. 10
- The Gentiles are invited to praise God on their own – v. 11
- Jesus the Messiah is shown to be the true hope of the Gentiles

The worship of God is the ultimate aim in salvation history

Jesus fulfills promises made to the Jewish patriarchs – to Abraham / David / etc.

He came to offer the kingdom to Israel – they rejected it / nailed Him to a cross – it was extended outwards

But – that was always His intent from the beginning

John 10:16 - 'I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring them also. And they shall hear My voice, and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.'

Douglas Wilson: 'This was not an esoteric aspect of the promises given to the fathers. It was not hidden in the fine print. Abraham was told, remember, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3).

Douglas Wilson: 'Abraham believed God in this matter before he was circumcised, making him the archetypical Gentile. And he was then circumcised, making him the archetypical Jew. He truly is father Abraham.'

Jew and Gentiles both are accepted of God thru the blood of the cross

Jew and Gentile join together in praising God for His salvation

When we think of the church today

Strong and weak / rich and poor / black and white / Jew / Gentile - - - all come to God thru the cross

Different personalities - loud extroverts / quiet introverts
We come from different backgrounds
Some come with scars from their past / baggage / wounds

Some are anxious or fearful / Some feel worthless and defeated

Others feel strong and on top of the world

All are sinners – all come to God thru the open door which the cross opened for us

III. The Blessing - v. 13

Romans 15:13 - 'Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

This is one of the great truths of Christianity

Where can we put our hope?

Where can we put our trust?

Everything in this world falters / fails in some way - - - it's a broken world

The unbeliever is one who essentially puts his hope in the wrong things

If your hope is in money - - - God may give you a lot of money – but show you it cannot satisfy – or you will find yourself chasing it all your life but it eludes your grasp

If your hope is in good health / long life - - - health can disappear – we all die someday

If your hope is in politics – politics will disappoint

If your hope is in other people - - - other people will disappoint

But – if your hope is in God – that hope endures / never fails – extends out into eternity

Hebrews 6:19 - 'This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.'

We have hope because God is on the throne – we are forgiven – 'It is well with my soul' - - - and has His hand on our lives - - - and is working all for good – and that gives us joy!

Philippians 1:6 - 'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.'

Conclusion

In this hope – there is peace

The thirst of the soul is for this peace of God

Peace is one of the quests which draws people to Christ - - - they lack peace / their hearts are unsettled

We live in an anxious age

Jonathan Haidt is a psychologist who has written a book: 'The anxious generation' – 'How the great rewiring of childhood is leading to an epidemic of mental illness

It's about the effects of smart phones / digital technology on Gen Z

We have seen a rise in anxiety / the multiplying of safe spaces – a place where one can go without any condemnation or critique of their behavior or beliefs

People don't want to hear opinions expressed they don't agree with – that's why Charlie Kirk was murdered – he dared to disagree

But God Himself tells us there is only one way to peace / only one safe space in the midst of the chaos and confusion of our world

Matthew 11:28-30 - 'Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light.'

We need the peace which Jesus give thru repentance and faith in His name