

Romans 15 7

Romans 15:7-12 (NKJV)

7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Receive- receiving something or someone to oneself with special concern. MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Romans 9-16.

This word for receive is the same one used in Romans 14:1 where this current topic began. He told us there to **Romans 14:1 (NKJV)**

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Remember I described it as the Steve, Ashley and Emma (and now Will) welcome as opposed to the greeting of a stranger at my door. Well there is more to this word. It is **welcoming a person to oneself with a special concern**. There is something in common. There is something you want to share. There is something you want to discuss. Isn't that how you feel when you find a believer in your workplace or in your worldly encounters. You experience a breath of fresh air. Paul is telling us, don't let your disagreements take that away. Don't let their freedoms or their personal legalisms separate you. Greet them this way. The passage in 14:1 tells the weak to receive the strong. Our verse in Chapter 15 tells all believers to receive all other believers. And in both cases it is for the same reason. Because Christ received us.

We have talked about this before, but I think it is important. We should not be impressed by those churches who feel they are the only ones who are true to God's Word. These churches often tell you what to believe and how to believe it. They demand conformity on very disputable scriptural references. They make their views of disputable doctrines the test of Christian orthodoxy and reject, as inferior, all who do not conform to their opinions. They have an appearance of uncompromising loyalty to God but really it is just weakness out of control. If these leaders really understood their bibles they would be less dogmatic on debatable issues and more loving toward those who see things differently. That is what Paul did and that is what Paul tells us to do.

Also we have seen this topic enough to know that we can gauge true belief by a believer's treatment of another believer. If a person is truly a believer they "get" the fact that they were up the creek without a paddle. They had nothing to commend themselves to God, nothing to offer Him, and already owed way more to God than they could ever pay. There would never be enough time to pay off the sin debt that we all carried. And then Christ took it all, and forgave those who

believe in Him. We “get” that we have been given a very very costly gift and it was offered on the principle of grace- favor that we didn’t deserve.

So when we meet another believer, we receive them based on the idea that if Christ could receive **me** to himself, he can receive **anyone**. And if **He** has received this person in front of me, who am I to deny him fellowship. I can’t declare that I am better than this person. I know I am not. This person entered a relationship with Christ the same way I did. By grace. So if I appreciate the gift that Christ gave to **me** of salvation, I cannot withhold my gratitude that he would save **someone else** the same way. And if I **reject** that person, I show **myself** as not really understanding just how much I needed grace. I am acting like my salvation had more merit in it than the person who I am rejecting. I show contempt for my Master’s decision. It is contemptible and revealing when we do such a thing. We show that we do not think much of the grace by which we were saved. And that is frightening.

So believers must receive believers.

Now, how did Christ receive us?

How did Christ receive sinners?

He is our model. He is the one who will teach us most about proper church relations. He leads the way in how to receive sinners like us.

Before we answer this question I would like to make an observation. Armenian teaching prioritizes **how we are to receive Christ**. It focuses its eyes on what it is that a human **must do** in order to receive what Christ has done for him. But Sovereign Grace teaching focuses most of its attention on **what Christ did** to receive **us**. The focus is more on **God’s** decision than on **our** decision. I used to make a living presenting the gospel to high school students. And I was often surprised when I was putting together a gospel presentation that the verses didn’t say what I wanted them to say. Even in John, where Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again, he did not give him steps. He didn’t give him things to pray. He told him about Nicodemus’s need and God’s provision. He told him about what God did to receive sinners. And everyone who believes in Christ will have everlasting life. But the focus was on **God’s** work, **God’s** decision. Jesus presented the Gospel in a lot different way than I was taught it should be done. Over the years I have adjusted and let scripture speak rather than the evangelism manuals. Christ receives sinners. And here are a few things we are told about that.

I am borrowing this outline from John MacArthur.

First- Christ receives believers joyously

Luke 15:2-7 (NKJV)

2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."

3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

I don't know about you but sometimes I lose this perspective. I forget just how important people are to God. I work with some co-workers who do not know Christ and I go for days with no concern for their eternity. I am absorbed with my stuff. But Jesus made it very clear that people are what God cares about on this planet. I don't think he is overly concerned about pollution or the extinction of some species or other. He knows that he will fill his newly remodeled earth with all the good stuff he made before. There will be no pollution in the New Jerusalem. And isn't that where our hope lies? I don't mean to say by that that we should not care about our families and our neighbors. Sometimes pollution is something we should avoid in order to love our neighbors like we love ourselves. And sometimes it is a loving thing to do to fight it. I am not saying we shouldn't. But I am saying that this is not the focus of our mission.

What God cares about is people. And they are a source of pleasure to Him. Think about the story. If you had 50 paper bags and you lost one while taking a walk in the woods, would you bother to go look for it? Would you be excited if you found it? Would you tell all your friends, I got my bag back! No. Why? You don't care about it. You don't value it. You would only go for a search like the one described in the parable for something you care deeply about. That is the point. God cares about His lost children. So when He brings them to Himself, He has Joy. Great Joy. This is a truth. This is a GOOD use of imagination. Imagine God glad when He brought you to Himself. He was! That is what God is like.

Now the application in our text is that we should welcome His saved ones the same way that Christ would. We should welcome them with Joy. They might have every weird quirk in the world. They might be from a different culture from ours and violate every rule for propriety we have. They might even have irritating

baggage from their childhood that continually dumps on your parade. Oh they could be a million things. And you might be involved in addressing their issues. But if they are a believer, if they are a found sheep, **that** is more important than anything else. Look around you again this morning. We should be receiving all these people who know Christ with JOY.

And what about the ones who don't come to Christ?

Matthew 23:37 (NKJV)

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

We see how God feels about people. It is a joy to him when they receive him and it is a sorrow to Him when they reject His calling.

So we are to receive each other, like Christ does, with joy.

Second Christ receives sinners for salvation **in spite of their sin.**

We have already talked about that a little bit.

Luke 18:9-14 (NKJV)

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

We see from this that spin doesn't work with God. It doesn't fool God. It doesn't impress God. The Pharisee had never truly seen himself. He never saw the sin that he was guilty of. He only saw what everyone else was guilty of. He was deceiving himself and he thought God saw it the same way. And he was rejected. Why? He had **no reason** to come to Christ. He didn't **need** Christ. He was good to go without Christ. He did not see that **his own sin** would keep him from inheriting eternal life.

But the humble man, he was received. And in what state was he received? He was received in a state of sin. God took him as he was. No spin. No show. No illusions about his worth. God forgive **me the sinner**. That is how a person comes to Christ. Are you right with Christ this morning? If you are not, you simply need to approach God with this attitude. God please forgive me because I am THE sinner. I see what I have done that is offensive to you. I see that all my motivations have been to please myself and not to please you. I have been acting like I am the God of my life. Now I realize that only you are God and I am a fool. You need to receive what Christ did on the cross for you. He died to take upon himself the full wrath of God for YOUR sin. You and I are the people who put Christ on the Cross. He went there as a consequence of our sin. Come to Him trusting Him to save you and He will. And He will take you exactly as you are.... A sinner.

Now if we are to receive God's children like He does, we will need to accept them as sinners. I have been counselling Jarrod and Suz about getting married lately. I have been emphasizing to them what our text tells us this morning. You are getting married to a sinner. And being together with another sinner won't exactly take away **any** of your sinful tendencies. In fact, the closer you are to another person the more you will see your own failures if you have a humble heart. So you are going to need to **receive** each other and **love** each other as sinners. That is what we need to do as church members as well. Our fellowship is chock full of sinners. In fact we don't have anyone on our membership roster who is not a sinner. So we needn't bother playing the game that says, "You are too big of a sinner for me to love". That would be the peak of arrogance. Who do we think we are? Are we superior to Christ? Because Christ chose to love and **welcome** this person into His fellowship. So who do we think we are to reject them from ours?

So if we are going to receive believers like Christ does, we will have to receive them as sinners.

Third, Jesus receives sinners impartially.

John 6:37 (NKJV)

37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

Also in Romans 2:11 we see there is no partiality with God.

Acts 10:34-35 (NKJV)

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

And James 2:1-4,8-9

James 2:1-4 (NKJV)

1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"

4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

James 2:8-9 (NKJV)

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;

9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

We see by this that it doesn't matter what your financial status is, it doesn't matter how popular you are, it doesn't matter how physically attractive you are, it doesn't matter how likeable you are, it doesn't matter how you are dressed, it doesn't matter how you talk, none of that will **endear** you to God and none of that will **keep** you from being **received** by God. You cannot be pretty enough to **win** God's favor or ugly enough to be **denied** it. The only thing that matters is if you respond to God's call on your life with faith, or if you respond with rejection. I don't know of any other place where that is true. It sure isn't true in the work force. It isn't true most places. Most places you must have some quality or skill to **commend yourself** to that group. But you do not with Christ, and by extension you should not need to in Christ's church.

We are to be people who receive people as impartially as God does. I don't know about you but I find that hard to do. I am drawn to people with good social skills who are comfortable to talk to. I like being around attractive people or funny people. I like being around people who like me and agree with me. And I find myself thinking thoughts about people who are socially unacceptable or unattractive that are wrong and not at all godly.

But I don't think I am alone. When you walk into a room, what do you scan the room for? That often tells us a lot about ourselves. It is not easy to be accepting

like Christ is accepting. He loves us all impartially. And we would do well to deal with our favoritism tendencies. I used to work with a guy delivering furniture for my dad. I used to wave at the pretty girls. He would wave to the unattractive ones. I looked over at him as he was doing it one day with a questioning look. He said, "They need it to." That's kind of the point. Everyone in Christ's church needs received. They all need accepted. They all need love. And the ones who are least likely to get attention are often the ones who need it the most. So if we are to receive people like Christ does, we will need to receive them impartially.

And **fourth**, Christ receives sinners **to the glory of God**.

What do you think **the primary purpose is** for the plan of salvation that God instituted? You might say, "to save sinners". I would argue that is not the primary goal. The primary goal is to glorify God.

Ephesians 1:4-6 (NKJV)

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

We are saved to be holy before God. We have been chosen ahead of time for adoption into God's family. Why? God felt like it. It was according to the good pleasure of His will. God was doing what makes Him happy. And what does that result in? The praise of the glory of His Grace.

You see, there is really only one way God can show off his grace. He needs to show it off on those who **do not** and **cannot** deserve it. The salvation of humans puts God's grace on display in a way that nothing else could ever do. If you read about angels, you see that grace is not a concept that is applied to them. The angels that rebelled seem to have no opportunity for grace. And those that remain have never sinned as far as we know.

Scripture displays that the angels have an awe about how God treats humans. They can't relate. But they can see God's grace in all its glory.

We have said it a lot and we will keep saying it. Salvation is designed by God and it is ultimately for God. It is all about God.

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJV)

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Here it is again. What is the church for? It is for the glory of God. And it will be an **eternal** glory.

Mike and Brad and I used to sit around a fire in his back yard and sometimes talk about theological issues. We talked at length about where sin came from. Mike believed that God created sin. I would do an injustice to him to explain exactly why, but His view of Sovereignty would not allow anything that was out of that Sovereignty. Lots of other scholars have different views, and it is fine if you have a different view, but I think Mike was right

Now the question might be, but why? And the answer might be tied to what we are studying today. **Grace is impossible to display without sin.** And if salvation is to display the grace of God for God's glory, maybe sin was introduced for the glory of God. It can't be denied that God could have nipped sin in the bud. It isn't like He wasn't aware of what the snake had in mind.

We might come up with all kind of objections, but at the end of the day it does not matter. Christ receives sinners for God's glory.

Now doesn't that put a different slant on our relationships with one another? We are to receive one another for the Glory of God. I think immediately about Christian marriages. We tend to put **ourselves** in the middle of the discussions about our marriages. We expect to have a certain degree of happiness and when the relationship fails to maintain that threshold, we think we have a legitimate reason to bail out. But we forget that this relationship, like all Christian relationships, is primarily **for the glory of God**. And our faithfulness to God in that relationship, even if the relationship is a disappointment, is a glorification to God. I have never heard of a divorce based on the idea that either party's faithfulness simply didn't glorify God enough.

The same is true in our Body. When we love each other, we glorify God. The world recognizes that we are **followers of Christ** when we **love one another**.

There is something different about how the church is to receive one another. It is different than any other group in the world. So to **receive one another like Christ receives us** is to receive each other for God's glory. It is not primarily about us.

So when people are difficult to deal with, when they are insulting and ungrateful, when they are unthoughtful, we don't quit. We don't reject them. We may have to rebuke them, but it is always with a mind to their improvement. And why?

Because we want to bring our God all the glory we can. We want to display His

goodness and grace every way we can. And receiving one another like Christ did is one sure way of doing it.

I'd like to end with a verse that I think puts everything in perspective.

Philippians 2:9-11 (NKJV)

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Christ and given Christ the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the destination of our whole world. Everyone who was ever born will be in this group. Think about this. We live in a world where God is mocked, He is blasphemed, He is hated. Christians tend to be treated badly because they stand for Christ. They are hunted down and killed in many countries. Their ideas are laughed at or scorned.

But one day the world will see God's glory. And everyone, Hitler, Mao, Stalin, Nietzsche, Bill Mahrer, every radical Islamist, and on and on will bow their knee to Jesus Christ. No one will escape this sobering day. They will all see that it was Jesus Christ who truly was the way the truth and the life. And all of their bold and confident talk did not change a thing. Out of their mouths will come the statement- **Jesus is Lord**. But it will be too late for them.

And believers will be praising their Lord. The church, together will give the praise to Christ and we will then see on that day, that, what Christ did in bringing all of us to Himself, was truly, all about the Glory of God.