

Welcome one another
Romans 15:1-7

This seems like an easy one, right?

How hard can it be to “welcome” someone?

Aren’t we just talking about a handshake, a smile, and pleasant conversation over coffee and donuts in Sunday school – right after church?

Welcome one another may include those things, but it is certainly not limited to those things.

This is a topic that the church needs to get right because our culture is getting it sooo wrong. The natural fallen world has always gotten it wrong. **The human default mode is division, strife, and suspicion.**

Once sin entered in ,the division started – Adam and Eve start blame shifting. She blames the serpent and Adam blames his wife. Has that ended???

Cain and Abel, the earliest set of brothers in the Bible – how does that end? Murder. Has that ended?

Once different nations appeared you start seeing societal sins of prejudice and cultural supremacy. Has that ended?

On and on it goes on a personal level and societal level; on a secular level and on a religious level.

Did you know that 71 countries have anti-Blasphemy laws? Including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Austria, Israel, and Switzerland. Add the Religious Freedom report to your reading list before you travel overseas, lest you be guilty of some blasphemy law.

<https://brnow.org/News/May-2017/Blasphemy-spotlighted-as-Christian-jailed-in-Indon>
<http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases/uscirf-releases-report-measuring-blasphemy-laws-compliance-human-rights>

Iceland eliminates Down Syndrome through abortion – they don’t want to welcome those children.

There was a Jan 2016 article about how “In this country, literally no young Christians believe that God created the earth.” https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/01/23/in-this-country-literally-no-young-christians-believe-that-god-created-the-earth/?utm_term=.a863813f3880

Last week CBS reported that Iceland had virtually eliminated Downs Syndrome. How???

Through selective abortion.

A correlation to their views on God as creator??

"Iceland isn't actually eliminating Down Syndrome. They're just killing everybody that has it. Big difference," she wrote. Patricia Heaton

The gospel entered a world that was filled with divisions, bigotry and prejudice on all sides. The Romans didn’t like the Jews, and the Jews didn’t like the gentiles - Romans, Greeks, or whatever. Such divisions and prejudices have never gone away.

Whether it is an issue of racial hatred or white supremacy, the brokenness of our world is making itself known in sinful ways.

Make no mistake, any doctrine of white or racial supremacy is sinful and heretical – it is a false doctrine that perverts the truth that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator. It needs to be met with clear gospel truth in society and in the church. Such divisions are a call to dive deeper into the truths of God, not move away from them.

<http://www.christianity.com/bible/why-kings-dream-overcame-christian-white-supremacy.html>

It was and will continue to be God's truth that brings change in the heart.

Russell Moore

Segregation, like slavery, was shown to be what all human consciences already knew it to be: not just a political injustice or a social inequity but also a sin against God and neighbor and a repudiation of the gospel. Regenerate hearts ultimately melted before such arguments because in them they heard the voice of their Christ, a voice they'd heard in the Scriptures themselves.

The arguments for racial Reconciliation will only be persuasive, to orthodox Christians when they appeal to a higher authority than the cultural captivity of white supremacy. Our arguments must appeal to the authority of Scripture and the historic Christian tradition. (paraphrase Russell Moore)

What does the Bible have to say that is so radical??

Romans 15:1-7

1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

This passage is in the context that goes back to chap 14 where Paul speaks about welcoming / receiving those who disagree about issues – such as meat sacrificed to idols

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Rom 14:1-2

The early church grew because it created a different culture- one of Welcoming for the Glory of God.

The gospel brought a new and unique understanding – IN Christ THERE IS NO GREEK OR JEW, or gentile, or slave, or freeman, male nor female, but all are one in Christ. – Col 3; Gal 3

The Church is fulfilling her unique role when she does what she is called to do best – Proclaim the gospel of the saving grace of God through Christ.

The context of that message is the biblical truth that we are ALL bigger sinners than we dare admit, even if our sin isn't racism.

The GOOD NEWS is that through faith in Christ alone we can more loved, forgiven and welcomed than we dare imagine.

The proclamation of the person and work of Christ broke down barriers because Christ broke down the barriers of the dividing wall between Greek and Jew. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves, and he showed how we are all guilty before God and we all need a savior.

When God is big in our thinking and people are small, we find some common ground as finite creatures who need a savior.

BUT when Man is Big and God is small, then human distinctives and differences are Magnified. Those differences become absolutized and form the basis for our identity and worth, i.e. they become IDOLS.

Ex: FRENCH REVOLUTION and the Reign of Terror- the most brutal and radical were those who were the most secular and hostile to religion. God was made small, so human agendas were exalted.

When you get rid of God then you pull out all the moral stops, and it can easily lead to a reign of terror. The enemy is defined as unworthy of life and there is no outside authority to say, "Stop". If the prejudice is given some sort of religious glaze, such as it was/is in some "church" circles, then it becomes a heresy against Biblical truth.

When man is big and God is small, we become less welcoming.

When we lose sight of God we elevate our own human traits, causes, and agendas, and we look down on those who are different.

When God has his rightful place in our hearts and minds, then everything else is kept in a proper perspective. We need the Divine measuring stick, not the human one, to keep us thinking clearly.

When we compare ourselves with a Big Holy God, we see that we are more like the most dangerous, different, and disgusting person in the world than we are like God. Pick the vilest sinner you can imagine – we all have our list. And we think about that list and we say to ourselves, "O God, I thank you that I'm not like that person, or group."

If God is small in our minds, then we can get away with it. BUT IF God IS BIG in our minds and hearts, then we see that we are more like that vile sinner than we are like God.

That brings a humbling and softening to our hearts and lives.

A lack of welcoming isn't a personality or temperament problem, or a social problem – it is a spiritual theological problem.

At its worst, it is functionally saying, "I don't need them, or I don't have anything to offer them. They don't have anything to offer me. God got it wrong when he put us together."

Thus, it is denying the truth that we in Christ are one body with different members, and each member has a part and a gift.

All these commands are so hard because they are so extensive – One another – that includes all in the body of Christ, the church. That means people that we wouldn't normally associate with; people who are different from us in many ways.

Think of the first century church – slave and free men; rich, poor, Jew, gentile, etc the social, religious, economic divides were huge, yet God says to them "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

The idea of welcoming in this context means that we are to welcome those who have a different opinion on some things – NOT things that are clear issues of right and wrong, but non-essential things about which Christians may have different opinions.

True community involves welcoming one another in Christ. There are many issues over which sincere Christians may disagree but must preserve unity in spite of such disagreements. We believe that in these areas Christian liberty must be allowed with one another. This includes the following areas:
Approach to non-essentials

Political affiliation and activity. . If it is NOT illegal or immoral.

Entertainment choices. .

Relating to the world. Unless there is clear sin involved we agree not to judge our brothers and sisters in Christ in the way that they choose to relate to the world.

Worship style preference. . Our worship is acceptable to God only because of Christ.

Ministry involvement preference. We recognize that each member of the body of Christ is gifted by God with unique passions for ministry. We agree to gladly allow God to lead each of us as he sees fit.

Philosophy of educating children. There are valid alternatives

Dietary convictions.

Use of tobacco and alcohol. We believe that the moderate use of tobacco or alcohol is not in itself sinful, unless the consumer a.) is not of legal age, b.) falls under the influence of either substance through intoxication or addiction, c.) violates the conscience of a weaker brother, or d.) violates his own conscience. About such matters, God has called us to peace.

Doctrinal convictions. There are doctrinal issues over which sincere, Bible believing Christians may disagree. These beliefs are not essential for a believer to be considered an orthodox Christian. Examples are: beliefs regarding baptism, the meaning of 'predestination,' worship music and style, etc. We prefer to emphasize major issues such as the virgin birth, the resurrection, the full deity and humanity of Christ, the inspiration and authority of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, Christ's imminent second coming, etc.

Welcome: **WHAT DOES WELCOME LOOK LIKE?** Living out "Love One Another"
Involves a warm greeting – "take to yourself"

Do we only want to welcome people like us, those we enjoy, who fill out tank? We size people up when we walk in.

14:1

We don't want to welcome people who differ politically, socially, etc.

Jesus was criticized for who he was with.
Babylon Bee - Hartford Ave Baptist church.

<https://babylonbee.com/news/churchs-welcome-sign-updated-long-list-exceptions/>

What or who would be on your list of exceptions???

This pushes us out of our comfort zone doesn't it.

Welcoming requires death to self.

v. 2 please neighbor for his good.

It's about your neighbor, not about you, or me.

It's Not about you liking the music or the sermon. As a body we need to have a concern for how we can welcome the unchurched or dechurched and not just please ourselves.

The hope that is ours in the gospel needs to be passed on. If we don't want to pass it on, we need to ask if we are really experiencing it ourselves – the grace and pardon for our sins.

Steve Fallin – Child Protection Advocate

“Welcoming is not risk free, because love is not risk free.”

Did Jesus take a risk for us to be welcomed by the Father?

HOW DO WE BECOME WELCOMERS?

v. 6-7 ...as Christ has welcomed you.

We give it to the degree we experience it.

Don't think, “Someone else will do it.” BE THAT SOMEONE because God has welcomed you. You would not be here if everyone here before you said, “Someone else will welcome her or him.”

Our church is small enough to where you can spot new faces, but not so small that you know everyone.

ACTION POINT – actually meet someone today- it may be someone you've seen but not met. Or it may be a first or second time visitor.

WELCOME IS SOMEONE WE EXPERIENCE BEFORE IT IS SOMETHING WE DO.

Jesus touched the leper and the woman who is shunned.

His welcoming grace is more than we are really comfortable with when it's not directed toward us = me.

He associated with people that would make us think, “you've crossed the line.”

His welcome was costly.

The reproach of God fell on Him.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE WELCOME OF GOD – deeply and personally in your heart. Not just intellectually.

Are you stunned by his welcome of YOU?

“How could I be welcome at the table of god?”

“How could I be in the family of god?”

The Casablanca Moment

Of all the people in all the towns in all the world...why am I saved? Why did I receive the Welcome of God?

Remember the words of the second religious song you learned. The first being “Jesus loves me.” The second being

JESUS LOVES THE LITTLE CHILDREN,
all the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
they are precious in his sight.
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

He loves adults too. He loves us, so we ought to love AND WELCOME one another.

Babylon Bee.

MOBILE, AL—After receiving several complaints regarding the accuracy of the “All are welcome” message on the sign in front of the church, local pastor Rick Pinkerton finally tacked on an additional disclaimer listing multiple exceptions to Hartford Ave Baptist Church’s welcome policy.

The sign now reads, “All are welcome, except sinners, tobacco chewers, tattooed people, democrats, homosexuals, smokers, drinkers, dancers, etc,” and, continuing on the other side, “hippies, hipsters, vegans, secular TV watchers, and Methodists,” sources confirmed.

“We just wanted to make sure we were advertising what our church is all about accurately,” Pastor Pinkerton said. “Now, the community will know exactly which groups of people are allowed to come hear God’s gracious offer of redemption in the gospel, and which ones we’d rather not get our hands dirty offering God’s grace to.”

“I’m really hoping the clarification leads to a much more homogeneous group of people gathering to worship the Lord this Sunday,” he added.

--	--