

**ACCEPTANCE IN THE COMMUNITY
ROMANS 15:7-13**

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BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED AND ACCEPTED BY GOD.**

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It seems to me, that Paul has been emphasizing the need to live harmoniously in the context of Christian community in this whole section. The church in Rome was a really diverse group of people. The greatest threat to their unity was the fact that the church consisted of Jewish believers in Christ, and people who came from all sorts of other religions to know Christ. So the greatest diversity was Jew and Gentile.

However, the church was made up of legalistic believers as well as liberated believers. There were wealthy people as well as poor. There were Roman citizens as well as slaves. There were educated and uneducated. And there were male as well as females. Since this was a real cosmopolitan city, there were people from all over the world. Yet Paul has continued to tell them that the world's attention would be drawn to the One True and Living God, if they could love one another and live in harmony. Nowhere would that have been possible except in the church of Jesus Christ.

We here at Devon Church are a lot like this church in Rome. We are a blended church in every way: education, socially, culturally, ethnically, and denominationally. We said so far that we are not just to tolerate one another; we are to embrace one another in love and in humility. And as I said last week, I think we do a pretty good job at that here.

In this week's passage, Paul is going to summarize this point one last time. Embracing one another in love, especially in our modern day society can be frightening, challenging, and sometimes people still want to fight against it.

Let me give you an example: You remember that church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) Let me tell you; you know how sometimes our worship leader Ken has all of us greeted one another in the service? Well at this church, I felt the people were so individualistic and stuffy, that they needed a good shot of friendliness.

During the announcements I said, “Starting next Sunday, we are going to start to greet one another as part of the worship service.

I noticed that at the close of service, a young man turned to the lady behind him and said, “Good morning.”

She was shocked by his boldness. She glared at him and said, “I beg your pardon! That friendliness stuff doesn’t start until next Sunday!”

Obviously they didn’t get it. But I’m pretty sure we do.

Look, this friendliness stuff is not something we do. It’s not some religious duty to be performed. It is who we are. We are accepted and loved by God. The theme of this morning’s passage is: **WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED AND ACCEPTED BY GOD.**

Again, let me remind us, Christianity is not doing religion. Christianity is being in a personal, intimate, passionate relationship with God. It is living with the knowledge and understanding of God’s acceptance and love for us. That knowledge and understanding is to cause us to love and accept one another.

I. THE NATURE OF ACCEPTANCE (Vs, 7)
GOD COMMANDS US TO LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER ON THE BASIS OF WHAT JESUS DID FOR US IN SALVATION.

Verse 7 describes the nature of acceptance: **GOD COMMANDS US TO LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER ON THE BASIS OF WHAT JESUS DID FOR US IN SALVATION.** Jesus not only died for me, He died for you. When we have differences, we must remember that we have both been saved and redeemed by the same Lord. Think of it this way. Knowing that Jesus loves me and died for me can lead to arrogance and pride, unless I am at the same time reminded that He loves you and died for you also.

A. THE COMMAND

In the first phrase, Paul issues the command. He says, “Therefore accept one another.” The ‘therefore’ summarizes this whole section concerning how we are to live in community. This concludes his argument that started in chapter 14, verse 1 where he commanded the church at Rome to accept one another. He went on to define acceptance by saying that not only should we not judge or look down on one another, we were to embrace one another in love. So this passage is the summary conclusion to this acceptance section.

However, this passage is a nice conclusion to the section we started in chapter 12 verses 1-2. In those verses, we were commanded to offer our lives as holy, living, and pleasing sacrifices to God. There is no better way to sacrifice than to lay down our pride, and embrace one another in love and acceptance. We do this by allowing God to change our thinking. In order to embrace one another in love and acceptance, we first need to think of others before we think of ourselves. That certainly is a new and radical way of thinking.

But I also think the passage this morning is a nice conclusion to what Paul started back in chapter 1 verses 14-17 where Paul said that he was dedicating to bring the Good News of Jesus and His salvation to all people. God wanted to restore the broken relationship between all people and Himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This salvation is offered freely to all who will believe. When we live in faith, we can live as a harmonious community in Christ. So if we have faith in Christ, then we are called to live in harmony with others who have faith in Christ.

B. THE EXAMPLE

So the command is that we are to love and accept one another. We are to embrace one another even though we are very different in many different ways. Next, Paul goes on to give us an example of what this acceptance looks like. He says that we are to accept one another just as Christ accepted us. Let's think about that for a moment. All of us were born sinners and we all have a natural bent towards sin. In addition to this natural bent, we all do things that we know are wrong. When we harm others and when we ignore or reject God, the Bible calls this sin. It is this sin that prevents us from enjoying a right relationship with God. Paul has already informed us that we cannot get right with God by being good or doing religious stuff. No, we were hopelessly lost, with no way to get back into a right relationship with God. But God made a way for us. Jesus agreed to pay the debt that our sin had accrued. Jesus agreed to come and die for our sins in the most horrific way and all we have to do is place our faith and trust in Jesus and His work on our behalf, and we can be in a right relationship with God. We didn't deserve this kind of sacrificial love, yet Jesus chose to lay down His life for us. He sacrificed

Himself so that we could be in a right relationship with God. He laid aside all His God rights and privileges for you and me.

That is the example Paul is giving us to follow. We are to set aside our rights and privileges. We are to sacrifice our pride and egos so that we can love and embrace one another. When we are tempted to look down on one another or judge one another, we must remember that instead of looking down on us and judging us, Jesus gave His life so that we could be reconciled to Him. If we follow Jesus' example, there is no room in the church for bitterness, unresolved anger, or prejudice. We are called to lay down our lives for one another.

C. THE PURPOSE

Paul then goes on to give the purpose for all of this: Jesus laid down His life so God would get the praise and glory. Through Jesus' selfless act, people from every tribe, nation, and tongue were saved and made part of the family of God. People all over the world gave ... and continue to give their lives to God. If we love one another the way Jesus loves us, then we can be sure that people will want to know how that happens. Our culture, our country, our schools will never achieve racial reconciliation. Why? Because, we are all basically selfish people; we can only look at the world from our personal, self-centered perspective.

Racial reconciliation can only happen in the context of the Christian community. Why? Because Jesus calls us to lay down our lives: our egos, our wills, our self-centered prejudices, and our grudges. He calls us to imitate Him in love. If Jesus died for you ... and if Jesus died for me ... then there should be nothing that divides us. We were saved the same way, by grace through faith, and we belong to the same family, the family of

God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. When the world around us recognizes that racial reconciliation has taken place in our church, they will have to give God the credit, because it doesn't happen anywhere else.

Here is the important point: **GOD COMMANDS US TO LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER ON THE BASIS OF WHAT JESUS DID FOR US IN SALVATION.**

II. THE POWER OF ACCEPTANCE (Vs. 8-12)
IT WAS GOD'S PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING TO BRING PEOPLE OF EVERY RACE, TRIBE, AND TONGUE TOGETHER INTO ONE FAMILY.

In verses 8-12 we see the power of acceptance. The power source of our acceptance is God Himself: **IT WAS GOD'S PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING TO BRING PEOPLE OF EVERY RACE, TRIBE, AND TONGUE TOGETHER INTO ONE FAMILY.** In the first book of the Bible, God promised Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation that tribes and nations throughout the world would be blessed through the Jews. In the last book of the Bible we see a great crowd gathered together before the throne of God singing praises to God, the crowd is composed of people from every tribe, nation, and tongue.

A. THE POWER SOURCE (V. 8a)

The first half of verse 8 describes the power source. The reason we can gather a diverse community together in love is made possible solely because of Jesus Christ. The only way to be reconciled with one another is to be reconciled with God and the only way to be reconciled with God is to place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Jesus was born into the nation and religion of Israel. Jesus was born a Jew. Remember, Jesus existed in eternity. He, along with the Holy Spirit, existed with the Father as One from the very

beginning. Jesus chose to enter the human experience so that He could make a way to repair the broken relationship between God and human beings. Jesus came as the promised Jewish Messiah.

B. THE POWER CONNECTION (Vs. 8b-9a)

His mission as Messiah is the power connection described in the second half of verse 8 through the first half of verse 9. God promised from the very beginning that He would send a special, anointed person to take care of the sin problem. Through Abraham and his family, God continued to paint a picture of what the savior would look like. The Messiah would come from the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Further, Messiah would come from the seed of King David. The entire Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament continues to predict and promise that Messiah would come through the Jewish nation. He would be their King and Deliverer.

Jesus spent almost all His time in ministry focused on Israel. Jesus felt His call and mission were to the Jews primarily: He came to gather together the lost sheep from the house of Israel.

God mainly dealt with the world through the Jewish nation; God made a covenant with Israel through Abraham and He promised to bless the nation of Israel greatly. However, they in turn were to become a blessing to the rest of the world. This was from the beginning when God chose Abraham. Look at the first phrase in verse 9: God blessed Israel so that they might be a blessing to the Gentiles and all the rest of the people of the world.

However, the Jews only fulfilled this command through Jesus. Jesus opened new access to God in which everybody could equally share. Before Christ, God ministered to

the world through His covenant with Israel. Non-Jews first had to become Jews in order to be in a relationship with God.

However, through Jesus, the world can come as it is to God. Through faith in Jesus, all of us have direct access to God, His mercy, His love, and all His promises. Now the covenant is ministered through Jesus. That's the covenant we celebrate in Communion.

C. THE POWER SURGE (Vs. 9b-12)

You can almost feel the power surge in the second half of verse 9 through verse 12. Paul wants to prove that it has been God's intention to build a blended community from the beginning. Remember, the Hebrew Scriptures had three divisions: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings. Paul quotes from all three sections to prove his point. Verse 10 is a quote from The Law, verse 12 is a quote from The Prophets, and the second half of verse 9 and verse 11 are quotes from The Writings.

1. EVANGELIZATION (V. 9b)

The second half of verse 9 has an evangelistic bent. This quote comes from the life of King David: It is found both in Psalm 18:49 and II Samuel 22:50. These words were written towards the end of King David's life. Keep this in mind: there was never a more successful king in Israel than David. He expanded Israel's borders to the farthest reaches. He actually occupied all of the land that God promised. He conquered all of Israel's enemies and through his bravery, courage, and loyalty to God, he proved there was no God but Jehovah. Gentile nations were brought under the legal and religious control of Israel. David continually made sure that everyone knew it was Jehovah God who gave him all the success.

I know that it's easy for us to take the credit when things go right in our lives. But what a powerful testimony we would make if we learned to give the credit to whom it belongs, God.

Now there are two common themes that go through this section. The first is the Gentiles, which refers to all people throughout the world who are not Jewish, and praise/glory. Paul is demonstrating that as Jews and non-Jews come together in the worship of the One True and Living God, the world will be forced to take notice and acknowledge that there is but one God.

2. INCORPORATION (Vs. 10-11)

That's what verses 10-11 are all about, incorporating non-Jews into the Jewish community. Verse 10 is a quote from Moses in Deuteronomy 32:43. It is a song that Moses sings as he nears the end of his life. The song recounts God's love, Israel's constant rebellion, God's faithfulness, His mercy, and His restoration. In the song Moses invites all nations to come along and rejoice in God. You see in David's song, he himself sang the praise of God. In Moses' song, he invites non-Jews to join the covenant and sing praises to God.

Verse 11 keeps up with this incorporation motif as Paul quotes another Psalm. This comes from Psalm 117:1. The Psalmist encourages all nations to sing praise to God. Now the interesting thing about this Psalm is that it is only two verses. The second verse talks about how great God's love is towards us and how His faithful love endures forever. In other words, God loves all people and it is His desire that all come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

If you are sitting here this morning, and are not sure if you are saved or not, don't let that doubt go on another day. Just quietly, right now, ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and ask Him to come into your heart and take over your life. The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you are saved. You will be in a right relationship with God.

3. RECONCILIATION (V. 12)

Which brings us to verse 12 where reconciliation is described: Without forgiveness of sins, there is really no hope for us to go on living. If there is no way to be reconciled with God, then there is no meaning or hope for life and without the shed blood of Jesus, there is no forgiveness of sin.

But thank God for Jesus Christ. Look at verse 12. This is a quote from the Prophet Isaiah 11:10. He is the same prophet that predicted the ministry of Jesus. He said, "We are all like sheep that had gone astray. Each of us had turned to his own way. And the Lord laid on Him, the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Now look carefully at verse 12. The first part of the quote deals with the nation of Israel. Jesse was the father of King David. This root, this Messiah, will come from the line of King David. But look at the words, "spring up." Paul could be referring to the resurrection of Jesus. Even though the Jewish Messiah, Jesus was executed and buried, He rose from the dead. He now is seated at the right hand of God and rules. He has conquered sin and death.

Now look at the second phrase. Jesus now rules over the nations, all nations. Jesus rules over Jews and Gentiles alike. Now that Jesus offers salvation simply by grace

through faith, salvation is open to all and everybody can live with hope because God is offering everyone salvation by grace through faith. Jesus is Lord both of Jews and non-Jews. For us this morning, Jesus is offering salvation to every country, ethnicity, culture and language represented here this morning, and all the rest.

But it is our privilege to evangelize the lost and tell them that God loves them and desires to accept them through faith in Jesus. It is our privilege to incorporate new believers into our congregation and enjoy our reconciliation with God and one another. This is truly reason for us to praise God. Keep this in mind: **IT WAS GOD'S PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING TO BRING PEOPLE OF EVERY RACE, TRIBE, AND TONGUE TOGETHER INTO ONE FAMILY.**

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF ACCEPTANCE (Vs. 13)
WE CAN ONLY TRULY LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER AS WE SURRENDER TO THE POWER AND CONTROL OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.

Can I stop here and say this? As nice as all this love and acceptance stuff sounds, it really is impossible. Let's be realistic. I can't do it and I'm quite sure you can't do it. But let's look at verse 13 because love and acceptance are a possibility ... but only through the power of the Holy Spirit: **WE CAN ONLY TRULY LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER AS WE SURRENDER TO THE POWER AND CONTROL OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.**

It is truly fitting that Paul closes this section with this verse: It's a benediction. He prays for and blesses the church at Rome with this prayer.

A. FILLED

In order for us to love and accept one another the way Jesus loves and accepts us, we must draw on the same power that Jesus drew on, the Holy Spirit. We must first of all be filled with the Holy Spirit. Look at the first half of this verse.

We are surrendering to the God of hope. All of us need hope. For the church at Rome, Jews and Gentiles needed hope. Males and Females needed hope. Citizens and Slaves needed hope. You and I need hope. There is only one God Who is the source to hope and our only access to Him is through Jesus by the power of His Holy Spirit.

As we surrender to God, as we leave our own personal agendas behind, as we seek to serve Him, He fills us with joy and peace and we learn to be content in all situations. We have confidence that God has forgiven us and now loves and accepts us.

Look at how we access this hope, joy, peace, love, and acceptance. We access it as we place our faith and trust in Jesus alone. What is the answer to people's fears and anxieties today? Faith in Jesus, Jesus really is the answer for the world today.

B. OVERFLOWING

As we give up control over areas of our life to God, the Holy Spirit fills those areas. He fills them up to overflowing. Our joy, peace, hope, loves and acceptance starts to spill over onto those around us. I can't love and accept you on my own. I'm too selfish. I'm too self-centered. I'm too sinful. But if I surrender my will to God as a holy and living sacrifice, if I allow God to change my thinking so that it matches His, and if I give control to the Holy Spirit, I can love and accept you because God's love, acceptance, peace, joy, and hope so fill me up that I can't contain it. It has to overflow on to you:

WE CAN ONLY TRULY LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER AS WE SURRENDER TO THE POWER AND CONTROL OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.

Believe me I know this is a tall order. I know without the direct intervention of God's Holy Spirit, it is an impossible task: **WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED AND ACCEPTED BY GOD.**

Yes, on our own, it is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. We just have to act out on the promises of God. His Holy Spirit will empower us. Listen to this story about childlike faith.

A little girl had been shopping with her Granddaddy in Wal-Mart. She must have been 6 years old, this beautiful blonde hair, an image of innocence. It was pouring outside. The kind of rain that gushes over the top of rain gutters, so much in a hurry to hit the earth it has no time to flow down the spout. We all stood there under the awning and just inside the door of the Wal-Mart.

We waited, some patiently, others irritated because nature messed up their hurried day. I am always mesmerized by rainfall. I got lost in the sound and sight of the heavens washing away the dirt and dust of the world. Memories of running, splashing as carefree as a child come pouring in as a welcome reprieve from the worries of my day.

The little voice was as sweet as it broke the hypnotic trance we were all caught in "Granddaddy, let's run through the rain," she said.

"What?" Granddaddy asked.

"Let's run through the rain!" She repeated.

"No, honey. We'll wait until it slows down a bit," Granddaddy replied.

This young child waited about another minute and repeated, "Granddaddy, let's run through the rain."

"We'll get soaked if we do," Granddaddy said.

"No, we won't, Granddaddy. That's not what you said this morning," the young girl said as she tugged at her Granddaddy's arm.

"This morning? When did I say we could run through the rain and not get wet?"

"Don't you remember? When you were talking to Grandmamma about her cancer, you said, 'If God get us through this, he can get us through anything!'"

The entire crowd stopped dead silent. I swear you couldn't hear anything but the rain. We all stood silently. No one came or left in the next few minutes.

Granddaddy paused and thought for a moment about what he would say. Now some would laugh it off and scold him for being silly. Some might even ignore what was said. But this was a moment of affirmation in a young child's life. A time when innocent trust can be nurtured so that it will bloom into faith.

"Honey, you are absolutely right. Let's run through the rain. If GOD let's us get wet, well maybe we just needed washing," Granddaddy said.

Then off they ran. We all stood watching, smiling and laughing as they darted past the cars and yes, through the puddles. They held their shopping bags over their heads just in case. They got soaked. But they were followed by a few who screamed and laughed like children all the way to their cars. And yes, I did. I ran. I got wet. I needed washing.

It's only as we learn to surrender to God's Holy Spirit that we can accomplish the impossible. If this type of love and acceptance were humanly possible, there would be no more wars and no more prejudice. However, we only need to look around at our country and our world to know that it's not the case.

But we as Christians can demonstrate that love and acceptance for one another as we allow God's Holy Spirit to fill us and overflow us.

Then, as we accomplish the impossible, people will have to give the credit, the praise, and the glory to God.

All things are possible through Christ who strengthens us.