

Welcome one another

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[0 : 0 0] We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. 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.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, that in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. This is the word of the Lord. Verse 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

We Christians are crazy. Everybody knows in this world brutality always wins.

[1 : 3 9] Predatory conquest is just the way things are and we should get used to it. But we crazy Christians don't believe that.

We believe that Jesus lived the human life we have failed to live and died the atoning death we don't want to die.

And he lived that life and died that death for us in our place. And our only response to him is to receive him with the empty hands of faith.

And we have done that. Because God publicly declared the success of Jesus in his life and in his death by raising him up from death.

So maybe we aren't so crazy. Here's the point. In this worldwide culture of brutality, Jesus is now building a counterculture of beauty.

[2 : 5 6] He's building it up through his message, his gospel, his good news for bad people. As we believe the gospel and it percolates down to a deep level of our being more and more, we come together as his new community and great things start happening.

In other words, gospel doctrine, and the word doctrine simply means teaching, gospel doctrine creates gospel culture.

The teachings of Jesus create a community like Jesus. His truth captivates our hearts and we begin imperfectly but visibly together to display something of his beauty.

The watching world might scoff at our beliefs, but no one can deny the beauty of human relationships. The living Christ is not just saving the isolated individual over here, the isolated individual over there.

He is bringing us together as his community. His beauty is not in this individual alone or in that individual alone, though that is real and glorious, but his beauty is also in the space between us, in the relational dynamics between us, which makes something of Jesus visible in the world today.

[4 : 37] It's in our relationships together that Jesus can be seen. Imperfectly but undeniably. So our privilege is together.

This is a privilege. Come together in our churches. And it starts feeling like Jesus has come to town. What could be greater?

So that's what I'm talking about when I say gospel doctrine creates gospel culture. Now, the Apostle Paul paints that picture for us here in Romans chapter 15.

And he's wrapping things up now. There are 16 chapters in the book. We're getting toward the end. He's wrapping things up. And two verses here in chapter 15 really stand out.

Verse 7, I'm going to preach on that now. Verse 13, I'm going to preach on this evening. And verses 7 and 13, now he gets around to explaining, how do I put this, the practical cash value of these astonishing ideas that he's been teaching throughout the book of Romans.

[5 : 51] So these verses display for us something of the beauty that the gospel creates in a church like St. Silas.

And here's the first of these two verses. This is amazing. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

What is the gospel doctrine in that verse? Christ has welcomed you. What is the gospel culture in that verse?

Welcome one another. And what is the net result? The display of God's glory. So here's the back story to this verse and the back story to the book of Romans.

The Roman churches included both Jewish believers in Jesus and Gentiles. The Jewish believers probably founded those churches.

[6 : 53] They received him as their Messiah. But in the year 49, all the Jews were kicked out of Rome for political purposes. And of course, these churches kind of reformed and kept going.

They became more Gentile in their style inevitably because the Jewish members were scattered far away. Then in the year 54, with the death of Emperor Claudius, many Jews returned to Rome.

They came back, the believing Jews came back into their churches, of course. But those churches had changed in the intervening years. Leadership had changed. And there was no going back to the old days when the Jewish members were more influential.

You can imagine the tension in those churches. It's easy to picture a congregational meeting where a Jewish member stands up and says, well, I was a founding member of this church.

And back in my day, and so forth. And then a Gentile member stands up. He says, well, while y'all were out of town, we kept this church going.

[8 : 03] And the Gentiles saw the Jews as stuck in the past. And the Jews saw the Gentiles as ungrateful, disrespectful. How does the Apostle Paul, as a good pastor, bring them together again?

He brings them back to the heart of Christ for them all. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. And it's a plural you. All of you for the glory of God.

Now, we all know the book of Romans teaches great theology. A Presbyterian friend of mine back in Nashville calls Romans the gorilla of the New Testament. This is 30,000 foot, high level, impressive, deeply thought out theology throughout Romans.

But all the weighty teaching of Romans can be summed up in four words. Christ has welcomed you.

That's why Paul says that here toward the end when he's summing things up. Christ does not just tolerate you. Christ has welcomed you.

[9 : 20] He does not look at you and roll his eyes. Something deep inside me instinctively feels. He probably despises me.

I mean, look at me. I'm a mess. This world between my two ears. It's really like a bad neighborhood. You don't want to go there. If he has any self-respect at all, he will despise me.

He should. And the gospel itself comes and says, no, the truth is, he has welcomed you.

He has said, you come on in here to my heart. Welcome. Christ has put out the welcome mat. He's not looking out his peripheral vision, looking for an exit strategy.

When he sees high-maintenance sinners coming his way, he lights up. He has welcomed you. His heart overflows with joy for the undeserving who stumble his way.

[10 : 28] So, okay, now we know. Not only do we know something of him, but now we also know how to treat one another. When the gospel, not any earthly identity, whether it's Jewish, Gentile, whatever, not any earthly identity, not any man-made market niche, or the latest whatever, but when Christ himself redefines us and our identity and worth according to his gospel, we discover how great it feels to be a welcoming community together.

Gosh, who wouldn't love to land there in a world like this? Without the gospel, the ground rules for human relationships sink to me-first big-dealness.

Even churches can be like that. It says in Mark's gospel, an argument arose among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. I mean, we read that and we think, those idiots, what?

They were right there with Jesus. Well, how many times have I done that? Maybe you too. Now, if we were atheists, then competitive selfishness would make sense.

Lenin put it simply, who, whom. Who is going to dominate whom? But we believe that God is there with a heart of mercy for the undeserving.

[12 : 11] He came into this world, to come find us and welcome us back. The whole message of the Bible can be summed up like this. I loved you, but I lost you.

And I want you back. And when we return, he doesn't scold us. He doesn't say, what took you so long?

He doesn't reproach us. He welcomes us. He is why we come together. He is enough to create a whole new world of welcome.

And every faithful church like St. Salus, you are an outpost of that new kingdom. You are, to use clunky academic language, you are an eschatological presence in a world of exhaustion.

Here in a world of, my life is none of your business. In a world of, who gives a rip, aloofness.

[13 : 24] Love for the undeserving came down in Jesus. And we experience him richly today in gospel community. This is a sacred space.

This is a precious gift. When gospel doctrine creates gospel culture, wow, flawed people like me, like you.

We can come in and breathe. We can relax. We can let our guard down. We can face ourselves and our failings and shortcomings and rethink our lives at a deep level and we can start to grow.

And I've never seen any city anywhere with too much of that. Too much forgiveness. Too much laughter. Too much freedom from the past. But that's the beauty that the gospel creates in our churches.

Even in our weakness. Especially in our weakness. we can be an experience of Jesus for the glory of God.

- [14 : 38] So the one another commands of the New Testament, we revere those, we love those, and savor those. Comfort one another, for example. Encourage one another. Honor one another and so forth.

But have you ever thought about the one another commands that do not appear in the New Testament? Improve one another. Humble one another.

Scrutinize one another. Pressure one another. Embarrass one another. Confess one another's sins. Here is where the New Testament takes us.

Welcome one another. As Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. Let's think it through in three simple steps. Because it's in three parts.

One, welcome one another. Therefore, therefore, welcome one another. And that word therefore shows us that this command is not arbitrary, context-less.

- [15 : 42] It flows out of all that Paul has taught in the book of Romans thus far. Here's why that matters. Everything Paul has taught from chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 15, verse 6, pours into welcome one another.

Therefore, welcome one another. Here's why that matters. This heartfelt embracing and welcoming and noticing and including of one another.

All that's involved here. This is not a glaze of superficial smiley niceness poured onto the surface of robust Christianity.

This is how robust, theologically conscientious Christianity pours out in a new community. Love gets us involved.

So we get past polite aloofness. polite aloofness is this world's kind of tragic counterfeit community.

- [16 : 58] Polite aloofness weakens, heartfelt welcome strengthens, and we get involved. Polite aloofness doesn't welcome people into its space, but love, the love of Christ, puts out the welcome mat.

So this word welcome, other translations say accept one another. That's not a wrong translation. But I like the word welcome.

It's a stronger word. I can accept someone and still keep my distance, but I accept them. But welcome, this stronger word, the word translated here with welcome actually means to take to oneself, to associate with, as Shakespeare said about true friends.

He said, grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel. I really need that.

in a world like this, I often feel alone. I feel I'm on my own. I feel lonely.

- [18 : 19] I need Christian friends who grapple even me to their soul with hoops of steel and say to me, Ray, I'm your friend and you're stuck with me. Now we're talking.

And I want to live in that kind of community. I want to strengthen that kind of community. Those friends thou hast and their adoption tried, I think it was Polonius who said, grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.

So when we welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed us, we do what he did. We welcome one another into our reality. And of course Paul said this to a church where there are lots of different kinds of people.

It is always the case churches are filled with lots of different kinds of people. Don Carson, the New Testament scholar, put it beautifully. He said, the church is made up of natural enemies.

What binds us together is not common education, race, income levels, politics, nationality, accents, jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance.

[19 : 32] Christians are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake. Bam! Our world needs to see that in us.

They're going to turn one way or the other toward Jesus or away from others, away from Jesus depending on whether his beauty appears on their horizon in a form they can see and recognize as comprehensible within their own framework.

And I'm really grateful that this verse says what it says in the New Testament because to make Jesus visible in the world today, we don't need PhDs. PhDs are great things but we can make Jesus visible today without knowing a lot.

Here is all we need to know. Christ has welcomed us. Elton Trueblood in his book *The Incendiary Fellowship* shows how every single one of us can get involved.

He writes the early Christian fellowship was amazing to the Romans precisely because there was nothing in their experience remotely similar to it. Religion they had in vast quantities but it was nothing like the early church.

[20 : 52] Much of the uniqueness of Christianity consisted of the fact that simple people could be amazingly powerful when they were members one of another. As everyone knows it is almost impossible to create a fire with one log even if it is a good one.

While several poor logs make an excellent fire if they stay together while they burn. The miracle of the early church was that of poor sticks making a grand conflagration.

well we're poor Christians so we qualify.

God will use poor Christians to create a grand conflagration so that more people find it easier to believe in Jesus as we stick together while we burn.

And then we welcome one another and them with the welcome of Christ himself. Now, wow, that's beautiful.

[22 : 06] So, second part, briefly. Number two, as Christ has welcomed you. It doesn't say, therefore welcome one another so that Christ will welcome you.

That would not be the gospel. He welcomed us when we gave him no reason.

to welcome us. He welcomed us when we didn't value his welcome. He welcomed us before we respected what it cost him. He welcomed us with all of our bad habits deeply ingrained.

He welcomed us when we brought nothing to the table that could benefit him. He welcomed us with open arms on the cross. No one else thinks the way Jesus thinks.

And the more we need from him, the more need we bring to him, the more regrets we have to own up to in front of him, the happier he is about us.

[23 : 11] We should never worry he might get fed up with us and turn on his heel and walk away. He said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. And when in those very painful moments in life confession of sin and betrayal and so forth is just pouring out of us and we're just weeping it out before him, he keeps saying to us in those intense moments, he keeps saying, I welcomed you before.

I welcome you now. I will never stop welcoming you. So tell me everything. Pour it out. weep it out. I have grappled you to my soul with hoops of steel.

That's who Christ is right now at this moment. The risen Christ above at this moment is not tired and he's not tired of you.

He's not tired of you. boy, that really changes how we see him and how we see and welcome one another.

But there's even a higher purpose at stake. That's the third thing just briefly. For the glory of God. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you now for the glory of God.

[24 : 45] There is so much divine glory in the world today. where could we go today to see the glory of God? We could all fly to Switzerland and hike in the Alps and have a blast together.

We'd be seeing the glory of God all around us. We could go up to the Isle of Sky. We could go to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. We could go to Royal Deeside. We could go to Bancre and then Ballotur and Bramard and so forth.

It's just filled with glory. The daffodils. Jannie and I love daffodils. Why? Because in Aberdeen the Lord carpets Aberdeen and Royal Deeside with daffodils every spring.

It's glorious. There's another place to see the glory of God. We just get in our car, drive down to church on Sunday morning.

And God puts his glory there. Anybody can come. In a church where the welcome of Christ is a felt reality and we come together and look each other deeply in the eye with an awareness.

[25 : 52] We're all so amazingly welcomed. What are we doing here? This is amazing. And we welcome one another. God says, that's my glory.

Let the whole world see it and come be part of it. God's glory. The great thing about this is that we display the glory of God not by being impressive.

Not even Jesus was impressive. We display God's glory in this world of false glories by opening up to the welcome of Christ so that we welcome one another.

therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

God be with you. God be with you.