

3. Learning to Accept One Another

In our last topic, we saw that that we are to help our physical and spiritual children learn to take root in Christ and learn to take root in the love of Christ. We see that Scripture describes 31 positive things that we will do as we take root in the love of Christ and 12 negative things that we will avoid as we take root in the love of Christ. These 31 positive one anothers are the things that will begin to flow through our lives to others as we learn to take root in Christ and His love. In fact, we might say that the roots determine the fruit. As we take root in Christ and His love, the Holy Spirit causes our lives to bear the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23 where we read, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Taken alphabetically, the first one another is to accept one another. Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (NASB) Here, we see that we are to accept one another as Christ has accepted us. This means that we need to go to the Scripture and see how Christ accepted people. Christ certainly showed us that He accepted His disciples. Mark 3:14 says, “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.” Christ showed that He accepted His disciples by choosing to invest much of His public ministry in their lives.

However, Christ also showed His acceptance of the people who many rejected. The tax collectors were a group of people who were rejected by the religious leaders in the time of Christ. We will look at two of the passages that illustrate this rejection. Matthew 9:9-11 says, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” In these verses, we see that Christ invited a rejected tax collector to follow him. Matthew in turn invited Christ to his house for dinner. Christ sat down with these tax collectors and sinners and they talked and ate together. The Pharisees saw that Christ talked and ate with tax collectors and they immediately complained to his disciples.

Luke 19:5-7 says, “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’” Zacchaeus had a rather negative reputation among the religious leaders because he was the chief tax collector for the area and he was also rich because he had cheated the people as he taxed them. Christ chose to show His acceptance of Zacchaeus by talking with him and then going with him to his home.

In both cases, we see that Christ accepted an invitation to the homes of tax collectors and ate the food that they served. The Jews had several reasons why they rejected the tax collectors. First, they worked for the hated Roman government that had occupied and controlled the land of Israel. Second, they charged more than they were supposed to charge when they taxed the people so they

were actually using their work to steal from the people. Third, they spent their time with the people who the Jews considered sinners. All of these things meant that the Jews, and especially the Jewish religious leaders, totally refused to accept them. Christ showed His full acceptance of both the tax collectors and the sinners by talking and eating with them.

However, Christ did much more than just show acceptance to those who followed Him. Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” In this verse, we see that Christ even accepted the people who condemned Him to death and crucified Him. Here, we see a much greater level of Christ’s acceptance than when He accepted His disciples or even the tax collectors and sinners that were rejected by the religious leaders. In this case, we see that Christ showed His acceptance for the very people who put Him to death. He treated them with love at the very time that He was dying for their sins.

Possibly the greatest passage of all that shows the acceptance of Christ is found in Matthew 26:49-50 where we read, “Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” In these verses, we see that Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss. At the very moment that Judas was carrying out the greatest betrayal in history, Christ still responded, “Friend, why are you come?” Of course, Christ knew exactly why Judas had come. Yet, Christ still treated Judas with acceptance by showing love and respect even at that moment. Christ chose to call Judas a friend even at the very moment that Judas was betraying him. Christ accepted him even though he was betraying Christ. Our verse in Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (NASB) This acceptance of Judas even in his betrayal is our model for accepting one another.

A second passage about what it means to accept one another is found in Romans 14:1-3 where we read, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for the *purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.” (NASB) Here, we see that part of accepting one another is accepting the opinions of one another. This means that we give one another the freedom to hold a different opinion than the opinion that we have. It means that we give that person the freedom to express his feelings and beliefs.

James 1:19-20 describes the attitude that we will have if we are accepting the opinions of others. Those verses say, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” The word that is translated “hear” means *to listen carefully so that there is understanding and obedience to what is said*. When people are upset, they are often so busy trying to figure out how they are going to get their point of view across to the other person that they do not listen to what the other person is saying. Instead of hearing, they are allowing their own anger to control their thinking. The result is that they answer the other person with great anger.

These verses in James make it very clear that true acceptance of others means that we will listen carefully and make every effort to try and understand what the person is really saying. 1 Corinthians 13:4 says that love is patient and love is kind. Patience means that we will accept the right of the other person to express his opinions, feelings and beliefs. It means that we will not get angry or try to interrupt the person because we think that the person might express opinions contrary to our opinions. Instead, patience means that we will be good listeners. We show that attitude by making every effort to understand what the other person is trying to say.

Kindness means that we will then answer with kindness even if we do not agree with the opinions or beliefs of the other person. In order to do this, we will be slow to speak so that we carefully think through our words. Then, we will communicate clearly and without words of judgment about the opinions of the other person. In this way, we are showing that we accept the right of the other person to have different opinions than our opinions. This gives both you and the other person the opportunity to realize that there are a variety of different possible choices. Then, you are able to discuss without wrath the various choices and the consequences, both good and bad, of those choices. In this way, each person is free to make wise decisions.

In the passage quoted earlier, from Romans 14:1-3, we see that those who chose to eat meat could eat meat. Those who chose to eat only vegetables could eat vegetables. It was a choice and each person could make the choice about what to eat. Later in the chapter, Paul pointed out the fact that he made the choice to make sure that he did not judge other Christians and encouraged all Christians to do the same. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.” (NASB) In this verse, Paul points out that true acceptance of the other person means that we choose not to judge the other person. We also choose not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in the way of the other person.

As we help either our physical or spiritual children grow and mature, we want to help them realize that we accept them even during those times when we disagree with their opinions, choices or decisions. We want to help them know that we listen to their opinions with patience and kindness. This will be shown by an attitude of acceptance of their right to express their thoughts and ideas. Even when they make unwise choices, we will follow the instructions of Ephesians 4:15 and speak the truth in love.

The Lord has called us to liberty in Christ. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” We are able to effectively serve one another in love when we accept others just as Christ has accepted us. Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (NASB) May the Lord richly bless you as you bring glory to God by accepting others just as Christ has accepted you.