

Who Do You Accept?

Romans 15:07a

Sermon Transcripts by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'd be surprised if you haven't thought about acceptance. Because it's one of these themes of our society -- the whole business of acceptance. And you know that it then progresses on to self-acceptance, because of people who don't accept me, and then I supposedly have trouble with self-acceptance. Now, that is what God is talking about in this verse we're studying, loved ones today. So, maybe you'd look out at this, Romans 15:7.

Romans 15:7, "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." And the New International Version translates it, "Accept one another." Accept one another therefore, as Christ has accepted you, for the glory of God." And, of course, this follows the whole discussion that we've been involved in, about how you treat new people who come into our church and whether you try to make them think what you think and that whole thing. So, then God is saying to us, "Accept one another therefore, as Christ has accepted you, for the glory of God."

Now, our miserable old society takes two extremes on this whole principle of acceptance. And as usual with all the errors that we make in our society, the extremes and the errors come from a misunderstanding of the application of law and grace in external society and in personal attitudes. That's where all our problems come from. It's a failure to understand when grace should be applied and when law should be applied. And it's a confusion of applying grace at times in the external government of society -- and at times applying law in the internal personal attitudes we have to each other.

The first extreme is the one that takes the attitude, acceptance is right. We should accept everybody, at all times, in any place, for any purpose, if we are truly to be free from discrimination. And that attitude, you know, is rife in our society. It's very appealing to you and me who think of ourselves as normal people. I mean we want to be nice people, we want to be civilized, and we don't want to discriminate. And so, when we hear that kind of view expressed, we rise to it, we say, "Yes, that's right, I don't want to discriminate against people. So let's accept everybody, at all times, in all places, for any purpose. So as an employer, it's my responsibility to accept slothful, inefficient, at times incompetent employees, because we have to accept people -- we ought to accept people."

And so we ought not to discriminate against anybody, we ought to accept everybody so that they have a sense of acceptance, because the worst thing you can do to anybody is give them a sense that they are not accepted. That same principle then seeps into our legal system, because our legal courts start letting loose some into society, all kinds of criminals, that aren't rehabilitated, that aren't changed. They are let out on our streets again because we argue what they need is acceptance by our society. They need acceptance. And so our job is to get them out there, and get them experiencing some kind of acceptance.

Even our teachers are in the same boat. We so often say now, let anybody teach our children. They may have a slightly different experience to the rest of us. They may have certain attitudes that seem to us a little less than normal. They may even have certain perversions in their lives, but let's allow them to teach our children. Because we want to bring our children up in an open society

where acceptance is practiced. And we want our children to experience a wider sphere of living and a broader view of things.

So, loved ones, very easily we can get ourselves in our society into a position where even you -- and I don't know if you have ever felt this -- you feel kind of guilty. If somebody comes to the door and it doesn't matter what kind of view they are expressing, you almost feel, Boy! I should let them come in. After all, I have to learn to accept people. I have to learn to accept their views. I have to be open-minded. I have to give acceptance to people. And so many of us, in our ordinary everyday practices, have this kind of guilt complex in the back of our minds. Now I don't want to be narrow. I don't want to be exclusive and I don't want to be parochial. I don't want to be un-accepting of other people. I want to accept people.

So one extreme in our society comes from trying to apply a principle of grace to the external government of our society. That's what we're doing. The principle of acceptance in that sense is a principle of grace. It works inside the personal attitude realm. But in the realm of the government of society, it brings about absolute chaos. The principle of grace of acceptance in that way is not meant to be applied to the external government of our society. The external government of our society depends on law. That's why God gave us law. And actually in the external ordering of our life together, you are not encouraged by God to accept anything and everything, for any purpose, at any time. Indeed you're encouraged to go the other way and I'd like to point that out to you in 1 Corinthians 5:11.

This is far from an attitude of acceptance that is recommended here. I Corinthians 5:11, "But rather, I wrote to you not to associate with any one, who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber -- not even to eat with such a one." And so in the realm of the ordering of our society, God intends us to discriminate, and not to accept everybody on all occasions and every situation. We are meant to see that certain people you should not associate with, and certain people should not be involved with you, in your job or in your school or in your own family life.

Now, really what we are doing is, we're trying to apply a principle of grace to external society. We're trying to apply a principle of the Kingdom of God to an unredeemed world. That's it. We did the same in England with the welfare state. We felt that everybody should share everything. It's so appealing, you know, everybody should share everything. And so, you know what we did, we went just enthusiastically into the whole welfare state's situation, except that the hearts of people were not sharing hearts. Some of them were sharing hearts, but some of them are grabbing hearts. And so, the whole medical system in the United Kingdom came toppling down because some were grabbing like mad. You can't apply a principle of grace or apply a principle of the Kingdom of God to an unredeemed society. It is rather embarrassing, but if you've read the New York Times, three or four months ago, not very much was made of this particular speech of Gorbachev's [President of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991] but it was reported in the New York Times. It was one of the first speeches he made after coming into power in Russia and the gist of it was: Society in its present state is not ready for communism. Some things have to change in the hearts of individuals before fully-fledged communism will work. It's very close to saying that until people's hearts are changed and made unselfish, you cannot practice a spirit of unselfishness that you impose by law. In fact, loved ones, the Bible is very, very definite that the only thing that holds society together at the moment is law. It isn't actually grace. It is primarily law that holds society together. You see it in I Timothy 1:8-10, "Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for

the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."

Now, when you are dealing with loved ones like that -- and you have to call them loved ones because they're beloved by God and they are to be beloved by us -- but when you are dealing with loved ones like that, God says you deal with them according to law. You don't accept them in as if they were the same as you. You don't accept them as your schoolteachers; you don't accept them as your employees. These people have to be dealt with by law. There is a right non-acceptance of that kind of thing.

And indeed, if we do not uphold that practice of law in this regard, eventually our society will disintegrate. Do you realize that? If we do not practice some kind of discrimination against what is wrong in people, if we do not make some distinction between people that are right and people that are wrong in the external governing of our society, our society will disintegrate. I'll show you where God warns us of that.

It's in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-7. "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first." This is the end of the world. "And the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes the seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time." What is restraining him now is law. And it is upheld by the Holy Spirit. "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he [the Holy Spirit] who now restrains it [through law] will do so until he is out of the way." That is until the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the world at a certain point and the whole rule of law will collapse entirely.

Now, as long as you and I refuse to apply the principle of law to the external government of our society, we accelerate the coming of lawlessness and we accelerate the coming of Anti-Christ. And we shorten the time during which we have to bring others close to Jesus and into a real relationship with God. So loved ones, it is vital that we do not fall into that extreme in our society today of trying to practice an indiscriminate acceptance of everybody, in all kinds of situations. That is, applying a principle of grace to the external government of society, which requires the application of the principle of law.

Now the other extreme of us miserable human beings, is that we apply the principle of law in the area where the principle of grace is to be applied. In regard to our husbands, in regard to our wives, we apply the principle of law and in regard to our sons and our daughters. We have witch-hunts in churches to find out the people that are wrong. We will not accept them because they are wrong. That's where the principle of grace is to be applied where we have to accept them in Jesus' name. We have postmortems in our marriages because we must find out which of us was wrong, and why we were wrong, and where we can level the blame. And we apply that principle of law heartlessly in the realm of personal attitudes where the principle of grace is to be applied. And the reason is that in your marriage, in the church, in your family, even in your personal relationships with your colleagues at work, the fabric of society is not in peril. It isn't. Law is applied when the fabric of society is in peril. The fabric of society isn't in peril because he didn't take out the garbage. The fabric of society is isn't in peril because your friend in the office took your typewriter. That's not a fabric of society issue; that's a personal attitude. That's a personal issue. In that realm, the practice of acceptance and the principle of grace is to

be applied. In this realm of personal attitudes where we apply the principle of law, we tear life apart and we destroy each other. That's what the Father says.

2 Corinthians 3:6-11, "Who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code, but in the Spirit." We want to apply the written code to our situation. We want to apply to that wife of ours the written code. We want to apply to that colleague at work the written code. "Not in a written code, but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendour?" And that was the dispensation of law, you remember. "For if there was splendor and the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendor. Indeed, in this case, what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor that surpasses it. For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor." And loved ones, we're in the realm of grace in our personal relationships. How do you enter into that kind of splendor with one another? How do we enter into that splendor in our personal attitudes? Well, let's go back to the verse, that we started to study and let's just look at it.

Romans 15:7, "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." That's how. Accept one another therefore, as Christ has accepted you, for the glory of God. That's how to behave towards your partner, that's how to behave towards your friend, that's how to behave towards your roommate, that's how to behave towards your son and your daughter -- accept one another as Christ has accepted you, for the glory of God. Now let's go to the hard bit. How did Christ accept people? Let our lost Pharisees look at John 8.

John 8:1, "They went each to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery." I mean it's incredible, how they caught her in adultery. It must have been "big brother is watching you," but they managed to catch her in adultery. And so you can imagine the glee with which they obviously brought her. "And placing her in the midst they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?' This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'"

And we tend to say, "Well, didn't he think that he was condoning the woman's sin? Wasn't he afraid that he would condone the woman's sin of adultery?" No. His life proclaimed his attitude to adultery. His own life made it clear to everybody what he thought of adultery. He was in no doubt about that. Well, did he not think that maybe the whole fabric of society would break down if he didn't condemn her? No, he knew the fabric of society wasn't in peril here. It was governed by law. Well, did he not think that by condemning the sin, then he can kind of reinforce her hatred of it and maybe help her to overcome it? No, because he knew there is only one condemnation of sin that matters and that had already taken place in eternity, and was going to be expressed in his death on Calvary.

And loved ones, you and I need to get that clear. Because I know at the moment you probably don't understand it, even though you have listened to the words. But Jesus didn't condemn her because the only condemnation of sin that mattered had already taken place in eternity and was going to be expressed in his death on Calvary and he knew that's the only condemnation that mattered, and any other condemnation was unnecessary and needless and pointless and a waste of time and indeed harmful. What was the condemnation of sin? Well, you can see it yourself in Romans 8:3, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." That's the only condemnation that matters.

Now could we all get out of our heads that what God did, was looked down upon Jesus as he hung on the cross and said, "You miserable sin, you bad sin, I condemn you, you rotten dirty sin, I hate you, I look down upon you, I condemn you." That's stupid. God didn't do that, that's pointless. What the Bible means is that God destroyed sin. That's the Greek word "condemn" there. Condemned it, damned it out of existence, and destroyed it, that's the only condemnation of sin that matters. You can't do that, can you? Can you destroy adultery? Can you destroy selfishness?

Then our condemnation simply aligns us with one other creature in the universe. There is only one other creature in the universe that condemns people, and that accuses the brethren night and day. And the only thing you do when you condemn your husband, or you condemn your friend, or you condemn your wife, or you condemn your child is -- you align yourself with the only other creature in the universe who is in the business of condemning and accusing, and that is Satan. Because the only condemnation of sin that is worth anything, is the condemnation that took place on Calvary, when God destroyed the power of sin. That's why the woman committed adultery. Do you know that? That's why she committed adultery, that's why your dear friends keep making errors and mistakes -- because sin is within them. It's inside them. That's what the Bible says, if you look at Romans 7:20.

Romans 7:20, "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." That's why she committed adultery -- because of the sin which dwelled within her. That's why your wife takes the attitude that you think is wrong. That's why your husband does the things that you disagree with and that you think are wrong. Because of sin which dwells within him and that has been condemned to death on Calvary.

It doesn't need to be condemned a second time. In fact, the more you condemn it, the more you convince them that nothing happened on Calvary. That's it, you see. You only fix that thing that hasn't been fixed. Every time you condemn a person, you actually convince them that nothing has been done to deliver them. Now if you say to me, well, what do they need? They need to believe it. Every little soul that keeps losing their temper with you, every dear one in your home that criticizes you, every loved one in your office that has a resentful attitude towards you -- what do they need? They don't need you to condemn their attitude. They don't need you to refuse to accept them. They need to believe that that has been destroyed on Calvary in them. They need to believe that. And the moment they believe that, they will walk away from their sins. That's it. You'll walk away from anything that you know has been destroyed on Calvary. It has no longer a grip on you.

How best do we bring them into that attitude? Oh! It's plainly written here in 2 Corinthians 5. 2 Corinthians 5, is the last one I'll point you to so that you'll take it home with you. It's 2 Corinthians 5:16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore if

anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." And you remember the basis for that is verse 14 just a few verses above.

2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." Verse 16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." That's the attitude that will help them.

You need to start seeing them as they really are in Jesus -- if you start seeing your friends, and your colleagues, your sons, and your daughters, your roommates, your husbands, your wives -- as crucified in Christ, as the old sin condemned to death has been destroyed and you accept them. You see that husband as a finger of Christ. Yes, you see that husband as a finger of Christ, as someone who has been put into Christ and is part of Christ and you love him, and respect him, and you accept him wholeheartedly with no reservations, because of that. That's the only thing that will ever do him any good at all. If you see that colleague at work who is so resentful and critical towards you, but you see them as one of that "all" for whom Christ died; "died for all, therefore all have died." [2 Corinthians 5:14] And you see him as somebody that has died with Christ. You see them as somebody that has been completely made anew. The old is passed away and you see them in that light, and you treat them that way, and you accept them as new. There springs then from your heart of faith to theirs, a little spark of faith -- it's unbelievable.

Actually you know this is true because you know that it has benefits on a purely psychic level. You know that when you've accepted people, they've almost seemed to change their attitude towards you. Now that's only because on a psychic or psychological level, there is a temporary benefit that mirrors in some way and shadows the eternal reality that they actually have been crucified with Christ, and they have been destroyed in Jesus, and they have been made absolutely new. And once you begin to accept them as that, wholeheartedly, as you'd accept Jesus, then the faith in your heart begins to grow in theirs, and they gradually begin to believe it, and to be freed from that sin.

Now if you say to me, it's a game -- it's a game. What you're talking about is a game. It's a power of positive thinking, that's what you are at. They are not right; that husband of mine is a jealous angry creature. That person in my office is resentful and critical, that's what they are. That boss of mine is dominating and domineering, that's what he is. You're asking me to play a game. No, in reality he has been crucified with Christ and made absolutely new and whole in Christ. And then if you say to me, oh! So he is going to be in heaven? No, if he persistently lives 70 years in not believing that, he will go into outer darkness of hell and live in that delusion that he has lived under. That's it.

Now this isn't a game; this is stark reality. This is playing for keeps. If he doesn't grab on during these 70 years to the fact that he has been changed, the delusion and lie in which he lives at this moment, will be his eternal state forever. It's far from a game, loved ones. This is deadly serious. That's why God says to us, "We've to accept each other, as Christ has accepted us, for the glory of God." What prevents us doing this? If we live on the near side of Calvary ourselves, instead of the far side, if we won't submit to the fact that we too have been crucified with Christ, and accept the absolute change that God has wrought in us in Jesus, and we fail to go through the cross to the resurrection side, then we'll live on the near side and we'll constantly be trying to establish the righteousness of our own unrighteousness by condemning the apparent unrighteousness of others, that's it. That's what will prevent us accepting others.

If we continue to live on the near side of Calvary then self-righteousness will make us sick and in order to try to prove that it's right to get rid of our sickness, we'll constantly be projecting our sickness onto others and condemning our unrighteousness in them. The way of splendor is altogether different. The way of splendor is our dear Father leaning over us this morning and saying, "My children, see that I have changed you all in Jesus my Son. I've changed you. I've changed you; I want you to see that. I want you to accept that yourselves, and I want you to start accepting everybody else in this room. And in your home, in your personal attitude, accept them -- as changed and made like my Son Jesus. And as you live in that beautiful world of whatsoever things are true and lovely and have good report, as you stop rejecting them, and you start accepting them as being pure and whole, you will see the miracle wrought in them and they will become what you believe."

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would apply this right now to any attitudes that you have convicted us of during this past half hour. Lord, if there has been in us an attitude that has anything less than total acceptance towards our friends, our colleagues at work, or our relatives. Lord, we would confess that this very moment. We would confess it as downright sin and unbelief. Lord, if our hearts have been eaten up by resentment and criticism, if our attitudes have been poisoned by condemnation towards our friends. If we, Lord, have taken part in anything that has made someone else feel not accepted, or feel looked down upon or despised. Lord, we would confess that sin, right now. Father, if we have applied our critical attitude to other people's views, if we have regarded them as second-class citizens because they have not thought the way we thought. Lord, we would confess that now, as downright sin and unbelief. Father, we believe what you've said is true, that Christ died for all, therefore all have died. We believe that our friends and our colleagues have been crucified with Christ. And we believe that they have been made new creations, and Lord we accept them as part of Jesus. If our Lord has condescended to allow them to become part of him, then we will not dare to reject them, lest we reject him also. So, Lord we thank you for showing to us the ways in which we should separate ourselves in our society. And yet for showing us the ways in which in our personal relationships, we're to accept each other as Christ has accepted us, for the glory of God. And Lord, we commit ourselves now to obeying you and to changing our attitudes this very day; for your glory. And now, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and forever more. Amen.