

What Kind of Church? (Part 6)

Romans 15:5-7

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### **The Power of a Warm Welcome**

“The power we have to embrace or to reject people is almost unlimited.” So writes Jerry Sittser in the opening pages of his book “Love One Another”. I am inclined to agree with him. We all know the sting of rejection by a group or an individual (I learned that in my first week of middle school!). On the other hand, we have all experienced the impact of a genuine welcome. I want our church to be known for its warm welcome, and not just because it makes people feel good. It’s much deeper than that. How we receive others says a lot about what we really believe about Jesus.

At the close of the book of Romans, Paul wrote to the church, “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). If you are like me, you may have read over this verse and missed the astonishing Gospel principle it presents. The principle is this: there is a direct connection between my understanding of the good news about Jesus and the way I treat other people.

### **Christ Has Welcomed You**

This is the basic message of the bible. God embraced you through his Son, Jesus. It is so basic, in fact that I fear we may assume it, before the truth really sinks in deep. Jesus has welcomed us, but not because of how worthy we are to be welcomed. He received us precisely at the moment when we were least desirable. Here’s how Paul described it earlier in Romans; “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

### **Gospel Welcome**

So when Paul says, “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you”, he means that the church ought to be a place where undesirables find a warm reception. The church ought to be a place where you actually don’t have to put on your “Sunday best” in order to belong. Jesus is our perfect model of this. And Paul wants us to understand that we communicate Gospel truth when we welcome people this way. When an outsider walks through our doors and they are received as an insider, we have already told them, in part, what we believe. On the other hand, a church that is exclusive, judgmental, or aloof cannot possibly understand the depth to which God has loved them in Christ.

This morning we are going to explore this connection between the welcome we have received and the welcome we are to give. My prayer is that we will continue

to grow into the kind of church that Jesus desires; a church that communicates Gospel truth through our welcome. As we study this morning, here are some questions to get you thinking and praying.

What are you learning about the significance of the words “Christ has welcomed you”? How is God taking you deeper into this Gospel truth?

Do you welcome others in a way that communicates your understanding of the Gospel?

What practical steps can you take to become a more welcoming Christ-follower?