

Accept one another

The term “accept” or “receive” is used only four places:

- Acts 28:2 The natives showed us unusual kindness: for they kindled a fire and *made us all welcome*, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.
- Romans 11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their *acceptance* be but life from the dead?
- Romans 14:3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has *received* him.
- Romans 15:7 Therefore *receive* one another just as Christ also *received* you, to the glory of God.

With so few examples, conclusions must be kept general and those conclusions must be compared to the rest of the New Testament.

- The Acts passage illustrates the common, non-religious usage.
- Romans 11:15 illustrates the spiritual impact of being accepted by God: life from the dead. This life is a figure of speech for re-connecting one’s spirit with God through faith. What is accepted by God is the faith of a person.
- Romans 14:3 assumes that those who have different ideas about foods and holidays are all accepted by God, that they all have acceptable faith.
- Romans 15:7 enjoins Christians to pass along the same acceptance criterion.

Problems of application:

- I cannot know absolutely if someone else has what God calls faith.
- Most set their own acceptance criteria of physical manifestations of faith. The problem is that the lists are all different, resulting in division. “Foods and holidays” are “expedient” whereas other practices are “essential.”
- Some accept anyone who makes a claim to faith. This is likely to give false hope to many and to cause the church to be maligned by the world due to behaviors that even unbelievers agree are wrong.

To help to resolve the problem, consider the rejection criteria described in the New Testament church.

- 1 Corinthians 5
 - Stay away from those who claim to be Christians who are sexually immoral, covetous, drunkards, or extortionists for these reasons:
 - Being too accepting breeds arrogance and malice
 - The behavior will spread among believers
 - Even unbelievers think it’s wrong
 - To wake up the so-called brother
 - Unbelievers with the same habits are not to be avoided.

- Paul does not give criteria for deciding if a person is faithful person having a bad day (week ,month,...) or an unbeliever making a self-deceived claim. So, he just calls this person a “so-called brother.” This cannot be a euphemism for an unbeliever, since Christians are not to avoid the morally bankrupt of the world, only the ones who claim to be Christians. The “so-called” brother may or may not have faith.
- The severity of the bad behavior is not delineated, leaving lots of room for division.
- Titus 3:10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.
- Romans 16:17 Note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine you have learned, and avoid them.
- 1 Timothy 1:20 Of whom are Hymaneus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (2 Timothy 2:17 – 18 describe one of their false teachings that “overthrow the faith of some.”)
- 1 Timothy 4:7 But reject profane and old wives’ fables
- 2 Timothy 2:23 Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

But these standards of rejection also are open to disputed application. Another approach is to consider:

- 1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.
- Romans 2:24 The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.
- Titus 2:5 [that younger women] be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God not be blasphemed.

Summary: Be accepting of differences unless:

- The spread of the gospel is being hindered by the scandal.
- The behavior is spreading within the church due to the example
- The difference causes division
- The difference undermines accomplishing the humanly impossible (the physical manifestation that a person’s faith is acceptable to God)

This still leaves a lot of latitude for misapplication and excuses for division. The most personal comparisons perhaps are the best because they allow for the least legalism:

- How much misunderstanding has God tolerated from me?
- How much bad behavior has God tolerated from me?

In every case of disputed doctrine or behavior, whether we think the situation to be a “dispute about doubtful things” or “destroying the faith of some,” my reaction is to grow the faith of the other person by whatever means necessary.