



The Harvester

*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*

Volume 41

May 2021

Number 10

Family Reception

Brian R. Kenyon

The way some earthly families receive one another is sometimes difficult to comprehend. On the one hand, in some families, for various reasons, relatives have little or nothing to do with each other. They never participate with each other in family reunions or other such gatherings. Even if they see each other at funerals, their acknowledgment of one another is awkward, almost as if they were strangers. On the other hand, some families are so accepting of one another that they will ignore, for example, that one in their midst is currently a sex trafficker or murderer at large, but they still get together with him at reunions and other gatherings as if everything were fine.

Before Jesus established His church, an incident happened indicating the strong family ties His disciples would have.

While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. ⁴⁷Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." ⁴⁸But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" ⁴⁹And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are

My mother and My brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." (Mt. 12:46-50)

Thus, it is no surprise the New Testament church, which consists of those who do "the will of My Father in heaven" (Mt. 12:50), is sometimes referred to as a spiritual household (1 Tim. 3:15; Gal. 6:10; Heb. 3:6). As the family of God, our acceptance of one another should be based on the standards of Christ. Sometimes, however, we allow our acceptance of one another to be based on skewed standards of the world or our own self-interests.

As covid restrictions begin to loosen and local churches of Christ start returning to their pre-covid schedule of Bible classes and worship services, let us be reminded of Paul's God-breathed words concerning our spiritual family reception.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. (Rom. 15:5-7)

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From these verses, it is clear that receiving one another is not an option. The word “receive [accept, NAS95; welcome, ESV]” (from *proslambano*, προσλαμβάνω) means to welcome, accept, receive. The word occurs several times, but three are of particular interest to this study. Paul opened the immediate context of which Romans 15:1-7 is the conclusion, by writing:

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to dispute over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³Let 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. (Rom. 14:1-3)

Later, Paul wrote to Philemon, the slave-master of Onesimus, “If then you count me [Paul] as a partner, receive him [Onesimus] as you would me” (Phile. 17). In both these contexts, Christians are called upon to receive those whom they might find difficult to accept, but because they are all family in Christ, they must welcome each other!

Romans 15:5-7 is in a context (Rom. 14:1-15:7) that is saturated with the spiritual family being a major reason Christians are to receive one another. “Brother” terminology is throughout the context to remind readers that the church is family in Christ (Rom. 14:10, 13, 15, 21). Also, the church is to edify, or build-up, one another:

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of

food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. (Rom. 14:19-20)

Family Reception Despite ...

There are sometimes obstacles, which too often become excuses, for refusing to accept spiritual family members. This is especially true as brethren who have not been assembling in person (and have strong opinions as to why not) begin coming back together again with brethren who have been assembling in person (and have strong opinions as to why). Here are some of the potential obstacles that must be overcome if we are to receive one another.

Our Cultural Backgrounds

The first century people to whom Paul wrote lived in a culture sharply divided into Jew and Gentile. Even though He already knew, Jesus was told of this divide when the Samaritan woman responded to His request of her to give Him water. She said, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (Jn. 4:9). Although from a worldly perspective, culture divides many people, such division should not occur in the spiritual family of God (cf. Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 3:11). Some statistics of covid-19 deaths may show a higher per capita death rate among minorities. This, coupled with bias news reports, may have people thinking that covid-19 deaths are a reflection of “racism.” This can potentially cause division when brethren

The Harvester

Published Monthly
Florida School of Preaching
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start assembling again in those congregations that include a mixture of minority-based cultures. The faithful church of Christ must not allow a covid theory of racism to fester and bring division. Rather, let us “receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7).

Our Present Status

Paul revealed that every member of the local church is as important as any other member (1 Cor. 12:12-26). If all church members had the same function, there would be no one to perform other functions a local church needs to have the influence God desires (1 Cor. 12:19-21 cf. Mt. 5:13-16). A brother in the eldership is no more important than a homebound widow who writes cards of encouragement to the sick and struggling. The preacher is no more important than the faithful teenager who invites many to “Come and see.” Every member of the church is important. To the extent that each needed function exists, the church is that much more (or less) influential. When it comes to spiritual family reception, a church member’s status should have no bearing on whether he or she is received. Everyone who “walks in the light” is to be welcomed into the local body of Christ (cf. 1 Jn. 1:7). Even those in sin and from whom the church has withdrawn fellowship are not to be treated like an enemy but “admonished as a brother” (2 Thes. 3:15). Since each member is as important as any other member in the local church, even when returning to pre-covid normal church services, we must “receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7).


Our Opinions

Opinions about matters of option should not form a wedge in spiritual family reception. The whole context of Romans 14:1-15:7 deals with the Scripturalness of matters of judgment over optional things such as eating meat or only vegetables and keeping or not keeping certain days. In Romans 14:1, Paul instructed the church to “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.” The term “disputes over doubtful things” is also translated “doubtful disputations” (KJV); “decision of scruples” (ASV); “quarrel over opinions” (ESV); and “passing judgment on his opinion” (NAS95). It is translated from a noun phrase that literally means, “for arguments of doubt” (Newman and Nida 256). The term “doubtful things [scruples, ASV]” is from a single word (*dialogismos*, διαλογισμός) that means

doubt, question; argument, dispute; opinion. In Romans 15:1, Paul wrote, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” Here the word “scruples [infirmities, KJV; failings, ESV; weaknesses, NAS]” (from *asthenema*, ἀσθένημα) refers to weakness, or perhaps in the context of Romans 14-15, perceived weakness (this Greek word occurs no where else in the NT). In English, “scruple” is a “feeling of doubt or hesitation with regard to the morality or propriety of a course of action” (www.dictionary.com).

Brothers and sisters in Christ can have strong opinions about how matters involving covid should have been (and currently should be) handled. Wearing the mask serves as a good illustration. Brethren on each side can find plenty of legitimate documentation to support their view. Likewise, Bible verses can be found to support either view. Some Christians in the United States have even appealed to American civil law to support their view of whether the mask can be legally mandated. “What would Jesus do [in the midst of the 2020-2021 covid pandemic]?” is difficult to ascertain exactly, other than He would have done what was best to promote His Father’s will (cf. Jn. 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38). We can also note, from Romans 15:7, that He would have received His spiritual family members no matter on what side of mask wearing they leaned as long as their being there did not violate God’s will or promote anything against it. If Jesus would not disfellowship us for our view of mask wearing, neither should we break fellowship over it. Rather, let us “receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7).

Conclusion

Their is no more important relationship for the Christian than his or her spiritual family with God as Father and Jesus as elder brother! We must not allow anything unbiblical to get in the way of that. Some church members may have allowed themselves to drift apart from their spiritual family relationships through the covid pandemic. Some may be coming back in the presence of each other for the first time in a long time. Let us receive one another in love as God would have us do. The only way true family reception can be achieved is for each member to “be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6). 

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	__ 1:00-4:15	Logic (270)	Beals	3
Tuesday	__ 8:30-12:00	Preacher and His Work (107)	Wheeler	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Computers and Churches (290)	Wheeler	3
Wednesday	__ 8:30-12:00	English I: Grammar (124)	Patterson	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Holy Spirit (250)	Kenyon	3
Thursday	__ 8:30-12:00	Genesis (264)	Kemp	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Romans (261)	Brownlow-Dindy	3
Friday	__ 8:30-12:00	Church History (241)	Daugherty	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	First and Second Corinthians (135)	Stearsman	3
Extension Classes				
Tuesday	__ 7:00-9:30	World Religions (275) (Wesconnett church of Christ, Jacksonville)	Ridgeway	2.5
Thursday	__ 6:00-8:30	First and Second Thessalonians and Galatians (137) (Tenth Street church of Christ, Apopka)	Kenyon	2.5
Thursday	__ 6:30-9:00	Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (203) (Eagle Lake church of Christ, Eagle Lake)	Brownlow-Dindy	2.5
Thursday	__ 6:00-8:30	Christian Evidences (244) (Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale)	Bauer	2.5