

Be Hospitable To One Another  
Rom 16:16; Rom 15:7; 1Pet 4:9; 1John 1:7  
February 18, 2024

J.C. Ryle, an influential preacher from the 1800's, wrote "This world is full of sorrow because it is full of sin. It is a dark place. It is a disappointing place. The brightest sunbeam in it is a friend..." And of course, he is speaking of Christ as the ultimate friend. Then he goes on to say, "**Friendship halves our sorrows and doubles our joys**" (J.C. Ryle).<sup>1</sup>

This is why it is worth whatever 'risk' is involved to move toward others and develop deeper friendships. No sorrow is deeper than the sorrow we bear alone. But when a friend walks through sorrow with us, they help us carry the weight of that sorrow. In contrast, our joy is multiplied when we have a friend to share our joy with. The depth of friendship we nurture today will be a source of grace and joy for a hundred tomorrows. We have no idea what we may walk through in the days ahead, but we know we need faithful friends who love God wholeheartedly to walk through it with us.

Today we are going to touch on 4 one another's in the NT that are closely related to each other. Each of these one another's is a call to take the initiative to move toward others as God has taken the initiative to move toward us in Christ; to open our hearts to one another and experience the deep blessing of sharing life together. We are called to...

- Greet One Another
- Welcome One Another
- Show Hospitality to one another
- Have fellowship with one another

Let 's begin by turning our attention to Romans 16 which is just one of many places where Paul calls his readers to Greet one another.<sup>2</sup> "**Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you**" (Rom 16:16). I've been excited about this week in our series because it is so practical when it comes to following Christ in friendship. And so doable. All of us can

greet one another warmly—and it makes a difference. In fact, it seems so basic that we might be tempted to just pass by these instructions as more of a comment than a command. Yet every single time a greeting is expressed in the NT, it is with personal warmth and significance. To demonstrate this, let's read the first 16 verses of Rom 16 where Paul goes out of his way to greet others 18 times! What I want you to notice is the personal warmth and the evidence of deep appreciation and affirmation that Paul expresses in his greetings. [1-16] It's evident from his greetings that Paul loves and respects these people with whom he has a deep bond in the Lord.

So what's in a greeting? What's the significance of greeting someone warmly? A warm greeting communicates honor, recognition, and value. It communicates a sense of belonging—"you have a place in my life." A warm greeting is the first step of open-heartedness toward someone and welcomes them into your life with hospitality and an invitation for deeper fellowship. The way you greet your family first thing in the morning can set the tone for their day. The way you greet people at work can shape the atmosphere, and open doors of opportunity for the gospel. When we greet one another warmly in the body of Christ, it affirms our oneness in Christ.

By the way, there are a great number of different greetings. For example:

- *The non-greeting* – not recognizing someone's presence. This can communicate rudeness. The only thing worse is refusing to return someone else's greeting.
- *The distant nod with no emotion greeting* – this is the "it-would-be-awkward-to-not-acknowledge-your-presence" nod. Expressionless but at least acknowledging that you are alive.
- *The Casual acquaintance greeting* – this is a pleasant greeting that communicates friendship, but perhaps still passing by or not expecting to get too deep in the moment.
- *The Warm expression of delight greeting* – this could include a hug or a two-handed handshake but most importantly your eyes and tone of voice communicate intentional love and delight. It says, "my world just changed for the better when you walked in!"

<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, The Best Friend (sermon).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ode1wd0sn5o>

<sup>2</sup> Rom 16:16; 1Cor 16:20; 2Cor 13:12; 1Thess 5:26; cf. 1Peter 5:14

I'm not saying you should use the greeting of delight every time, nor would it always be appropriate. I'm simply trying to encourage you to consider how you greet others and what it communicates to them. And then consider how a Jesus-shaped vision of relating to people informs what you want to communicate in your greeting. A simple greeting can invite someone into your world. And you have so much to offer because you have the grace of God, and the Spirit of God, the gospel, and a ministry of encouragement. A simple greeting can communicate to others that they matter.

But what about the holy kiss? In the first century, a kiss on the forehead or cheek was a common way to show affectionate love when family members greeted each other. Outside of one's biological family, the kiss of greeting represented honor, respect, or deep friendship. What's essential in vs. 26 is not the kiss itself, but the loving, family-like affection it's meant to display. Today, we may express the warmth of affection with handshakes or hugs. But here's the bottom line: *The gospel of Jesus Christ unites into one family of God, people of varying social and economic backgrounds without discrimination.* And our greetings should reflect that oneness.

While we may use another *form* other than a kiss, the *function* we are called to emulate in greeting one another is *moving toward one another* with warm-hearted affection. Take the initiative. *Just as Christ took the initiative to move toward us, so we can imitate him by taking the first move toward others.*<sup>3</sup>

By the way, I realize that taking the initiative to greet others can be extremely intimidating for those who are particularly introverted. Yet I want to remind us that our journey of following Christ in friendship is worth taking risks for, and whether we are introverted or extroverted, our goal is to adopt a Jesus-shaped vision of approaching and relating to other people. So this week, let's try to raise our temperature of greeting one another by one degree.

To take this one step further, ask yourself, "Is there anyone that I avoid greeting because our relationship is ill?" If there is, I would urge you to seek reconciliation in that relationship soon—before we gather for the Lord's supper two weeks from today.

The next step beyond greeting one another is welcoming or accepting one another. Now we turn Romans 15:7. **"Therefore welcome one another as Christ as welcomed you, for the glory of God"** (Rom 15:7, ESV).

At first you may think that this seems redundant. Aren't greeting and welcoming the same thing? When vs. 7 uses the word welcome it means more than a mere greeting. The NAS translates vs. 7 this way, **"Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God"** (Rom 15:7, NAS). The Greek term that is translated either *welcome* or *accept* literally means "to take in addition to." The sense is to "take alongside" or to *receive* someone. The sense here is to include. God is calling us to open our hearts to another believer as a fellow child of God.

Notice that vs. 7 begins with the word "therefore," which points us back to the preceding context. Paul ends chapter 13 by reminding us that the way we fulfill God's law, the way we truly please God, is by our love for one another. Then he proceeds in chapter 14 to warn us against passing judgment on one another, causing one another to stumble. Remember, the early church was made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers who have very different customs and therefore different matters of conscience, particularly about what they ate. Jews has been accustomed to strict dietary regulations while Gentiles ate freely with little concern for conscience.

In 14:3 Paul is addressing both those with a stronger conscience and those with a weaker conscience, saying, "Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, *for God has welcomed him.*" In other words, whether you have the stronger or the weaker conscience, you need to guard your heart against judging your brother. If God has welcomed your brother, then you would

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Welch, *Caring for One Another: 8 Essential Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships*, pg. 17.

despise God by not also welcoming him. Paul continues now in chapter 15 by calling us to selfless love for one another that results in harmony and unity before God. [15:1-6] Now, vs. 7 is the climax: [vs. 7]

So Paul is calling us to move from judging one another to welcoming/accepting/receiving one another through Christlike, selfless love. This means that secondary issues must be kept secondary to our love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is made up of people from different socio and economic backgrounds, we have differing perspectives on politics, and a thousand different preferences and interests. Yet all of these secondary things should not overshadow what the gospel has done in each believer's life. We may have almost nothing else in common with a particular brother or sister, but if Christ has welcomed them to Himself through the gospel, we must honor Christ by also accepting them into our Christian fellowship.

This means that friendship in the body of Christ is not merely based on common interests or personal attraction. When we learn to welcome others on the basis of Christ's welcome through the gospel, we have a much higher percentage of potential friendships. So instead of first asking, "what do we have in common," ask, "what has Christ done for you?"

One of the ways we get pulled into the ditch of judging other people is assigning motivations to their hearts by using our imagination to fill in the gaps of what we assume people think and believe. Thus, most of our judgments are premature. Instead, we need to ask questions and really get to know people. The more we understand them, the less chance we will have of misjudging them.

To be clear, what Paul is *not* saying is that we should overlook unrepentant sin in another believer's life. Welcoming or not judging does *not* mean, as a recent Superbowl ad suggested, that Jesus "gets us" and therefore we should just accept everyone and anyone regardless of lifestyles that are contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Jesus is not a "hater", but He does hate sin. Jesus welcomes us to come as we are but insists that we don't stay as we are. There's a message out there that says you can come to Jesus

on *your* terms. But when people truly came to Jesus *on His terms*, His message for them is, "go and sin no more."

So, when we talk about not judging, we are talking about not using our own personal standards of judgment apart from God's word. When we talk about loving one another, it includes holding one another accountable to God's judgment of right and wrong as clearly articulated in Scripture. Welcoming and accepting one another means opening our hearts to fellow believers who come to Jesus *on His terms of repentance and faith* regardless of their background. The church is defined not by personal or cultural ideologies, but by Jesus Himself who calls us to forsake our sinful ways and follow Him in the company of other believers.

Paul's point in Romans 15 is that when we gather as God's people on Jesus' terms, regardless of our secondary differences, we are to open our hearts to one another in welcome.

In addition to greeting one another and welcoming or accepting one another, we are called to open our hearts to each other by showing hospitality to one another. "**Show hospitality to one another without grumbling**" (1Peter 4:9). I would suggest that if *welcoming* one another is opening your heart to someone, then *showing hospitality* is taking the next step to inviting them into your daily life.

Hospitality literally means, "love of strangers." Jesus Himself modeled hospitality in John 1:37-39 when two men who had heard Him preach asked where He was staying. And Jesus responded with an invitation, "Come and see." "They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day." Later in Matthew 9:10, we read "many tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples." Jesus' hospitality opened the door to long term relationships with His disciples.

Hospitality was particularly essential to the spread of the gospel in the first century as pastors, missionaries, and letter carriers relied on fellow believers in visiting cities for safe lodging. Furthermore, homes were the only place for the church to gather for worship and the only place of refuge for believers fleeing persecution. The ministry of the early church was built on hospitality.

There is a wide range of ministry that can be done from a heart of hospitality today. It can range from inviting someone over for campfire to taking in troubled teen for months at a time. Let me encourage you to broaden your view of hospitality beyond what we normally think of as inviting someone into our home for a meal. What happens when we begin with heart of hospitality? *A heart of hospitality invites people into your life experience wherever you may be.* A heart of hospitality says, “don’t do alone what we can do together.” For example, a heart of hospitality may invite people into your home or it may invite people out to dinner. It may welcome them to a campfire, or invite them to join you at ball game. Hospitality may invite people to the golf course, into your fishing boat, to a coffee shop, or into a shopping venture. Hospitality says, “come experience life with me.” A hospitable heart doesn’t just pass people by, but pauses to invite them into conversation.

Hospitality is an invitation for others to enter into your life, and experience the next step of friendship as you take the initiative to open your heart, your home, and your world in a spirit of generosity.

By the way, hospitality is not just for fellow believers. I firmly believe that in our present time, hospitality is the most effective means of evangelism. Establishing caring relationships is essential to our ministry of the gospel. Our unsaved friends, neighbors, and co-workers need to see and hear the transformative impact of the gospel in our daily lives. By inviting people into our lives, we invite them into conversations about family, work, relationships, politics, finances, hobbies, and the difference Jesus makes in all of these areas of our life. Yet we will best serve our friends outside the church when we are anchored in a network of loving, supportive, and committed relationships in the church.

So, if hospitality is so beneficial in nurturing friendship, why does Peter tell us to do it without grumbling or without complaint? Because hospitality can be inconvenient, and costly, not to mention stretching our comfort zone,

especially when it comes to serving those who have needs. So how do we shepherd our hearts when taking others in puts us out? It’s essential for us to remember how God has been hospitable to us. In Ephesians 2, Paul reminds us that “now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” God honors generous hospitality because our hospitality to others reflects His hospitality toward us.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the benefit of greeting one another, welcoming one another, and showing hospitality toward one another, is that it opens the door to genuine fellowship with one another. **“If we walk in the light, as God Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1John 1:7). Fellowship is not mere small talk over coffee. *Fellowship is walking in the light of Christ together.* Fellowship is abiding in Jesus *together*. Fellowship is blending our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Fellowship is edifying or building up one another because our interaction is shaped by God’s active grace in our lives with Jesus at the center.

In true fellowship, we listen, we care, we encourage, we teach, we exhort, we confess, we counsel, we bear with, we laugh, we weep, we worship, and we grow together. This is why one of the four top priorities of the early church was fellowship: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching *and to fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). God is calling us to go deeper into the blessing of fellowship with one another, yet it is only possible as we first experience true fellowship with God by abiding in Jesus and His word.

Teaching through the *one anothers* can create a vision for gospel culture but teaching itself will not create gospel culture. Only as we live out the *one anothers* will gospel culture become a reality as brothers and sisters in Christ grow into true Christ-reflecting friends. And living out the *one anothers* is a pathway of safety, protection, personal growth, and abounding joy!

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<sup>4</sup> *Living out the One Anothers of Scripture: A 30-Day Devotional* by Revive Our Hearts, pg. 116-117.

## *Putting On a Hospitable Heart*

Here are some practical suggestions as we consider how we greet one another, welcome and accept one another, and show hospitality to one another to open the door of genuine fellowship and friendship with one another.<sup>5</sup>

1. Ground your personal security in God's love and faithfulness. When you are secure in your relationship with Christ, you are free from the fear of man and the approval of man. Just as Jesus was secure in the Father, so you can be secure in your relationship with Jesus with the confidence to approach strangers and entrust yourself to friends.
2. Take initiative to move toward people.
3. Take interest in other's lives (needs and interests) and be ready to share yours. Ask yourself, "Who can I invite into my life and what aspect of my life (or what experience) can I share with them?"
4. Adopt a servant-hearted aim to encourage and build up others for the sake of Christ.
5. Learn to delight in people and enjoy the relationship (look for the good in others, the evidence of God's grace and unique design).
6. Remember that caring for people and loving people is an essential aspect of our discipleship (following Christ into true friendship by imitating Jesus who loves people with a wholehearted love for God).
7. Pray for God to give you a Jesus-shaped vision of relating to others.

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