

Faces of Rejection (Part 2)

Accepting Others

One of our goals when dealing with people, is to reinforce to them how God sees them. When they interact with us, they should quickly realise that “I am loveable”, “I am accepted for who I am”, “I belong”. Their self-concept is their own responsibility, but I am accountable to God for the degree to which I reflect His heart towards them. There are different types of rejection people face. Rejection by family, rejection because of ethnicity, rejection at school, rejection for their faith, rejection in ministry, rejection because of age, and rejection in the corporate world. Acceptance from man is often fickle. I have experienced many types of rejection but through it all have known and experienced God’s delight.

Zeph 3:17 The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

The degree to which we have a revelation of God’s love and acceptance determines the degree to which we experience freedom from the fear of rejection from man. A lot of the self-acceptance that builds up in my heart comes from the fact that I feel accepted by others around me. **There is a role we play in bringing healing to those around us when we carry God’s heart of acceptance towards them.** The focus of this message is on how to minister acceptance to those around us. **We will only accept others fully and authentically to the degree to which we have a revelation of Christ’s acceptance of us.**

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

The result of this is that God is praised and receives the glory.

The Greek words "pros lambano" means "to take towards oneself," "to receive towards oneself," or "to accept towards oneself." Think of those around you that are experiencing rejection in one way or another and ask the Lord to help you to creatively minister His acceptance. We have all experienced some form of rejection:

- *Let's just be friends. I don't want to spoil our friendship.*
- *Unfortunately, we don't have a position that meets your unique qualifications at this time. You are overqualified for us and might get bored.*
- *We regret to inform you that we cannot grant you acceptance to X University. You are welcome to reapply in future enrolments.*
- *You are very talented, and I expect you to do great things...elsewhere.*

One of the antidotes for such rejection is self-acceptance. **In self-acceptance I know that I belong, and I am loveable and accepted just as I am. I don't need to be perfect to be accepted.** We need to create a culture of self-acceptance. The heart cry of many people is that they want to experience unconditional love and acceptance. We ultimately find this in God, but in our community as believers we are called to reinforce it.

A. What does the Bible instruct about accepting others?

1. We are called to renounce the pride and conceit that often leads to the exclusion of the lowly.

Romans 12:16 - "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

2. We are called to renounce discrimination based on appearance or wealth.

James 2:2-4 - "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say,

'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"

What are your value equivalents for inclusion? In other words, on what basis do you include and exclude people? We are going to have very different people coming to our church.

3. We are called to be patient with one another, forgiving others as we have been forgiven.

Colossians 3:13 - "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Is there anyone you have blacklisted and disregarded because of how they have treated you in the past? Is this a forbidden alliance stated in scripture or is God calling you to accept them with all their proclivities once again? We tend to have rules around this. I know someone who gives people 3 chances and then blacklists them.

4. We have been called to renounce any form of ethnic, economic or gender discrimination?

Galatians 3:28 - "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Do you fully accept people regardless of ethnicity, gender or social class? That labourer has body odour because they have had to cycle 20km to work and have no showering facilities there. It's not because they are poor.

5. We are called to communicate acceptance by being down-to-earth and patient with those around us.

Ephesians 4:2 - "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

When we are impatient with those who are slower, less smart or weaker than us it communicates rejection. Many people are hurt because they feel that those around them are impatient with their incompetence or slowness despite their efforts. I know someone who is fearful of impatient bosses today because her dad would hit her when she made mistakes in maths whilst he was teaching her. Rather get a tutor to help your kids if you get impatient with them.

6. We are called to communicate acceptance by cheerfully letting people into our world.

1 Peter 4:9 - "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."

Many people short-circuit the blessing of God that comes with hospitality because they do so with grumbling.

The word translated hospitality is in Greek *philoxenoi* meaning "hospitable" or "fond of guests". It is derived from two Greek words: *philos* (meaning "dear" or "beloved") and *xenos* (meaning "guest" or "stranger"). Biblical hospitality extends to how we treat strangers and people we don't know well. Interesting we live in a society of heightened suspicion and have lost the art of being hospitable to strangers and foreigners. We need to remember that when we entertain strangers, they might not do things in line with our cultural norms. Part of accepting other people is acknowledging that people are different, and your way is not the only way. Don't be selective about this. For example, loving Spanish people but keeping rural Zulu people at arm's length. Not all Nigerians in SA are drug dealers. Many are wonderful people of prayer and extremely generous. Don't let what you see in the media become your complete view of people groups.

7. We are called to communicate acceptance by being impartial and renouncing favouritism.

*James 2:8-9 - "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, **you sin** and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."*

Are you consistent in how you treat people?

B. What are some practical ways of showing acceptance in everyday life?

You demonstrate acceptance of others,

- when you communicate acceptance of their imperfect past
- when you laugh at their jokes and playfulness
- when you take into consideration their recreational preferences
- when you allow them to be themselves (e.g. what they chose to eat at a restaurant etc)
- when you value them as a powerful human being with my own unique taste (in clothes, hairstyles, sport, food, movies, humour, etc)
- when you treat them in an age-appropriate manner (e.g. allowing kids to be kids and being patient with their growth)
- when you allow them to work using their own style and approach
- when you don't micromanage them unnecessarily
- when you see Christ in them, not just in yourself.
- when you listen fully even when you don't agree with them
- when you allow them to drive according to their skill level, preference and personality. In other words you don't back seat drive.
- when you are patient with slower people
- when you allow people to lead when they are in charge
- when you don't impose your career choice or personal dreams onto your kids
- when you refrain from mocking people who are different to you e.g. you are skinny and they are fat OR you don't exercise and they do OR you like meat and they don't OR you think they have 'interesting' taste when they put spreads on bread and you are more conservative.

Sadly, many families have become dysfunctional because of enmeshment which occurs when we don't accept one another. One of the marks of a functional family is differentiation. This only occurs when you communicate acceptance.

Having said this, it is important to note that the overextension of acceptance is placating and unsanctified mercy when it comes to values and morality. This is when we endorse unbiblical attitudes, values and behaviour. *1 Corinthians 5:11 - "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people."* This is implying exclusion based on specific behaviours or lifestyles. In our discussion on acceptance we need to bear in mind the principles of forbidden alliances as outlined in my book, *Spiritual Alliances*. The Bible has strong things to say about those who are duplicitous. The word "duplicitous" refers to being deceitful or dishonest, and can describe someone who is two-faced or presents a false appearance. It comes from a Latin word meaning double or two-faced.

C. What stops us from accepting others?

Research in 1999 found that people who hold more negative thoughts towards other groups tend to perceive more differences between themselves and the groups, which in turn reinforces their negative attitudes. It is interesting how people can do a lot to justify their prejudice. You can create differences that are imagined in order to justify your anxiety and anger towards a group of people. The result is persistent exclusion. Another study in 2004 found that people who are higher in authoritarianism tend to hold more prejudiced attitudes

because of their need for certainty and closure. A study in 2002 found that people who experience anxiety and threat tend to be more prejudiced against outgroups. Therefore, it was found that where there is anxiety, fear and anger there is more likely to be prejudiced behaviour. **I believe that we tend to distance ourselves from that which we fear. The more we do so, the more ignorant we become concerning those people.** This gives room for more perceptual distortions to fill our knowledge gaps regarding that group or person. Other research also established that people are more likely to accept members of their in-group than outsiders even when the differences between the two groups are arbitrary.

Conclusion and charge

Think of the people you struggle to accept and those you actively exclude. Examine your heart with regards to the scriptures we have discussed today. Let's make a commitment to accept those whom God has accepted. Let's commit to meditate on Christ's acceptance of us and from there endeavour to minister acceptance to others. Ask God to show you what things you need to start accepting about the people around you. You will be much happier once you have settled this in your heart.

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