

One Another, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Accept One Another as Christ Accepted You

Romans 15:1-7

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson brings to a climax the long discussion Paul began in Romans 14 about the strong and the weak. What is doctrinally at stake is how a diverse congregation, divided over matters of conscience and background, can live together in unity without either side compromising its conscience or despising the other. Paul's answer is not to flatten the differences but to lift everyone's eyes to Christ. The strong are to bear with the weak and not please themselves, because "even Christ did not please himself," and all are to accept one another "just as Christ accepted you." Help students see that the gospel is not a side illustration here; it is the foundation, the model, and the power of Christian acceptance.

The doctrinal center of the passage is verse 7: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Make sure students grasp the measure and the goal. The measure is Christ's acceptance of us, which was wholly undeserved, costly, and welcoming, given to us while we were weak and ungodly (Romans 5:6-8). The goal is the glory of God; a congregation of very different people who genuinely welcome one another puts the reconciling power of the gospel on display. At the same time, guard against a soft misreading. Christ's acceptance of us never meant indifference to our sin; he welcomed us in order to make us holy. Acceptance in the body is warm and full, but it is not the abandonment of the call to godly living.

Keep the lesson pressed into the heart and hands. Paul is calling for self-denial: bearing with others' weaknesses, declining to please ourselves, seeking the neighbor's good and edification. This cuts against our preferences and our pride. Do not let the class admire these verses about acceptance while keeping a particular brother or sister at arm's length. Press each truth toward a real relationship and a concrete step of welcome. The aim is that students would leave not merely understanding Christ's acceptance of them but extending that same acceptance, for God's glory, to the people God has placed beside them.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). What does it reveal about the gospel that strength in the church is defined not by being served but by bearing with and serving the weaker?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the surprise of this verse register. In the world, strength means privilege; the strong are served, deferred to, and free to please themselves. Paul turns this completely upside down. In the church, strength is not a license but an obligation. The strong “ought” to bear with the weak. Their strength exists for the sake of others, not for their own comfort. Help students feel how thoroughly this reverses our instincts.

Explain what “bearing with” means here. The word carries the sense of taking up and carrying a burden, of supporting a weight. The strong are not merely to put up with the weak from a distance, nor to wait for them to catch up, but to come underneath their weakness and help carry it. This is what it means to “not please ourselves,” to set aside our own preference and freedom for the sake of a brother who is not yet where we are.

Show that this is the very shape of the gospel. Christ was the strong one who came underneath our weakness and carried it. He bore our sins, our sorrows, our burdens. The whole movement of the gospel is the strong stooping to lift the weak, the rich becoming poor that the poor might be made rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). When the strong bear with the weak in the church, they are reenacting in miniature what Christ did for them all.

Apply it. Ask students to consider the areas where they are genuinely strong, in knowledge, in maturity, in freedom of conscience, in resources, and to see those strengths as given for the sake of others. The question for the strong is never “How can I exercise my freedom?” but “How can I use my strength to bear up a weaker brother?” That is the gospel made visible in congregational life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Strength in the church as an obligation to serve, not a privilege to enjoy (Romans 15:1; Galatians 6:2)
- Christ as the strong one who bore our weakness and carried our burdens (Isaiah 53:4–6; Matthew 8:17)
- The gospel pattern of the strong stooping to lift the weak (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5–8)
- The setting aside of our own freedom and preference for a brother’s sake (Romans 14:13–21)
- Spiritual gifts and maturity given for building up others, not self-gratification (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul’s definition of strength overturn the world’s understanding of it?
- What does it mean to come underneath a weaker brother’s burden rather than wait for him to catch up?
- Where are you strong, and how could that strength be spent to bear up someone weaker?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about where you stand. In some matters you are the “strong” and in others the “weak.” Where have you used your strength, your knowledge, your freedom, or your maturity, to please yourself and look down on a weaker brother rather than to bear with him? Name one concrete instance.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honesty rather than self-justification. We instinctively cast ourselves as the strong and the mature, and others as the weak who need to grow up. Paul’s instruction cuts against the pride that hides in our strength. Help students examine where their strength has become a platform for looking down rather than a means of lifting up.

Draw out how this looks. The strong can despise the weak by flaunting their freedom, by treating a brother’s tender conscience as foolishness, by insisting on their rights regardless of the wound it causes, by an attitude of “I am past all that.” Paul has already warned that knowledge can puff up while love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Encourage students to name a specific instance rather than confessing in vague generalities.

Turn toward grace and a step forward. Remind students that whatever strength they have is a gift, not an achievement, and that in other matters they are the weak ones who need others to bear with them. The aim is not to feel ashamed of strength but to repent of using it selfishly and to begin spending it for others. Ask each student to name one concrete instance and one way they could instead bear with that brother.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger that knowledge and freedom puff up rather than build up (1 Corinthians 8:1–3)
- Strength and maturity as gifts of grace, not grounds for boasting (1 Corinthians 4:7)
- Self-examination as a healthy part of the Christian walk (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- The call to repent of selfish strength and spend it for the weaker brother

Discussion Prompts

- How can strength, knowledge, or freedom become a way of looking down on others?
- Why is it humbling to remember that in some matters you are the weak one?
- Name one concrete instance where you pleased yourself rather than bore with a weaker brother.

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says, "Each of us should please our neighbor for their good, to build them up" (Romans 15:2). How is this God-honoring desire to please our neighbor different from sinful people-pleasing, and what is the goal that keeps it healthy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by clearing up an apparent tension. Elsewhere Paul says that if he were still trying to please people, he would not be a servant of Christ (Galatians 1:10), yet here he commands us to please our neighbor. The two are not in conflict, because Paul attaches a goal to the pleasing here: "for their good, to build them up." The difference lies entirely in the aim.

Distinguish the two. Sinful people-pleasing seeks the other person's approval for our own sake; it is fear of man dressed up as kindness, and it will compromise truth and conscience to win acceptance. Godly pleasing of the neighbor seeks the other person's good for their sake; it sets aside our own preferences to build them up in Christ. One is driven by what we want from them; the other is driven by what we want for them.

Show how the goal protects us. The phrase "for their good, to build them up" is the safeguard. We please our neighbor only insofar as it genuinely builds them up toward Christ and maturity. This means real love will sometimes not please, when pleasing would harm them. We do not flatter or enable sin in the name of being agreeable. We seek their true good, which is their growth into Christ, even when that good is not the same as their momentary comfort.

Apply it. Christ himself is the model: he pleased us in the deepest sense by seeking our eternal good at the cost of his own comfort, yet he never flattered us or excused our sin. Ask students where they need to start considering a brother's genuine edification in their choices, and where, on the other hand, their pleasing of others has slipped into mere approval-seeking that fails to seek their real good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between godly love that seeks the neighbor's good and sinful fear of man (Romans 15:2; Galatians 1:10)
- Edification, building one another up in Christ, as the goal that keeps love healthy (Ephesians 4:15-16)
- Christ as the one who pleased us by seeking our eternal good, never by flattering our sin
- Love that will sometimes decline to please when pleasing would harm a brother (Proverbs 27:6)
- The neighbor's true good defined as growth into maturity in Christ, not mere comfort

Discussion Prompts

- What separates seeking a neighbor's good from simply seeking their approval?
- Why does genuine love sometimes refuse to please, and how is that still love?
- Where is your pleasing of others driven by what you want from them rather than for them?

Question 4

Student Question:

Examine your own motives in how you treat others. Where does your effort to please people flow from a fear of their disapproval rather than from love that seeks their good? Name one relationship where you need this difference sorted out.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the previous truth into a mirror. Fear of man is one of the most common and best-disguised sins, because it so often looks like kindness, flexibility, and humility. We bend ourselves to keep people happy, avoid hard conversations, and shrink from anything that might cost us their approval, all while telling ourselves we are simply being loving. Help students look beneath their agreeableness to their motives.

Draw out the danger. Proverbs warns that the fear of man brings a snare (Proverbs 29:25). When we are governed by what others think of us, we will eventually compromise truth, withhold a needed word, or go along with what we know is wrong, all to protect our standing. Fear of man makes us servants of other people's opinions rather than servants of Christ. It is the opposite of the love that genuinely seeks another's good.

Turn toward freedom and a step forward. The cure for fear of man is the fear of God and the security of being already accepted in Christ. When we know we are welcomed by God, we are freed to seek others' real good rather than their approval. Ask students to name one specific relationship where approval-seeking has replaced loving honesty, and what it would look like to act for that person's true good, even at the cost of their immediate approval.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of man as a snare that enslaves us to others' opinions (Proverbs 29:25)
- The fear of God and our acceptance in Christ as the cure for fear of man (Galatians 1:10)
- The difference between loving honesty and self-protective approval-seeking (Ephesians 4:15)
- Our security in being already accepted by God as the ground of fearless love (Romans 15:7)

Discussion Prompts

- How does fear of man disguise itself as kindness or humility?
- How does knowing you are already accepted in Christ free you from needing others' approval?
- Name one relationship where approval-seeking has crowded out love that seeks the other's true good.

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul grounds everything in Christ: “For even Christ did not please himself” (Romans 15:3). How does the example of Jesus, who set aside his own comfort and bore reproach for us, define the entire shape of the Christian life together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the weight of this short phrase land. Paul could have argued for self-denial in many ways, but he reaches straight for the example of Jesus, and he sums up the entire incarnation and cross in four words: he “did not please himself.” The eternal Son had every right to please himself, to remain in glory, to be served. Instead he set all of it aside for us. That single sentence is the pattern for the whole of Christian living together.

Notice the Scripture Paul attaches. He quotes Psalm 69: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” Christ so identified with us and with his Father’s purpose that he bore the reproach, the mockery, the shame that should have fallen elsewhere. He did not insulate himself from cost; he absorbed it. The strong one took the blows so the weak could be welcomed. This is what not pleasing himself meant in the flesh and blood of his life and death.

Show how this defines the church’s life. If the Lord of glory did not please himself, then a self-pleasing Christianity is a contradiction in terms. The whole “one another” life, bearing with, accepting, serving, forgiving, flows from this single fountainhead. We are followers of a Savior whose entire posture was self-giving, and we cannot follow him while clutching our own comfort and preference as the highest good.

Apply it with hope. The same Christ who is our model is also our power. Paul will go on to pray that God would grant the Romans to live in harmony, knowing that this kind of self-denial is beyond mere willpower. Ask students where the principle “Christ did not please himself” most directly challenges their current way of living in the church, and encourage them that the Spirit forms this mind of Christ in those who keep looking to him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s refusal to please himself as the summary of the incarnation and cross (Romans 15:3; Philippians 2:5–8)
- Christ bearing the reproach that fell on others, taking the cost for our welcome (Psalm 69:9; Isaiah 53:4–5)
- Self-denial as the basic shape of the Christian life, modeled on Christ (Mark 8:34)
- The contradiction of a self-pleasing Christianity that ignores the Lord’s example
- The Spirit forming the self-giving mind of Christ in those who follow him (Galatians 5:22–25)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul appeal to Christ’s example rather than simply commanding self-denial?

- What does it mean that Christ bore the reproach that should have fallen on us?
- Where does “Christ did not please himself” most directly challenge how you live in the church?

Question 6

Student Question:

Look honestly at your week. Where did “pleasing yourself” quietly govern your choices in the church family, your preferences in worship, your comfort, your schedule, your opinions? Name one place where following Christ’s example would mean laying your own preference down.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the example of Christ into the ordinary texture of the student’s week. Self-pleasing rarely announces itself; it simply assumes that our comfort, our preferences, and our convenience are the natural center around which everything else should arrange itself. Help students notice how often “what I prefer” silently governs their participation in the body.

Draw out where it hides. It hides in our attitudes about worship, when we evaluate the assembly by whether it suited our taste rather than whether God was honored and others were built up. It hides in our schedules, when serving the church must fit around our comfort rather than our comfort yielding to the church’s need. It hides in our opinions, when we treat our preferences on disputable matters as the standard everyone else should meet. Encourage honesty about one specific area.

Turn toward grace and a concrete step. The goal is not to manufacture guilt over every preference, for not all preferences are sinful. The goal is to learn the freedom of a Savior who did not please himself, and to begin laying down our preferences where doing so would build up the body. Ask students to name one specific place this week where following Christ’s example would mean gladly setting their own preference aside for a brother or sister.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-pleasing as the quiet default of the unsundered heart (Romans 15:1, 3)
- The call to evaluate worship and church life by God’s honor and others’ edification, not personal taste
- The freedom of laying down preferences for the good of the body (1 Corinthians 10:23–24)
- Christ’s example as the standard against which we measure our self-pleasing

Discussion Prompts

- Where does “what I prefer” silently govern how you participate in the church?

- How might you evaluate the assembly by God's honor and others' good rather than your own taste?
- Name one specific place this week where following Christ would mean laying your preference down.

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says the Scriptures "were written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). What does this teach us about the purpose and abiding authority of the Scriptures for Christians today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by noticing how Paul has just used Scripture. He quoted a psalm written a thousand years earlier and applied it directly to Christ and to the Roman Christians, then steps back to state the principle: what was written in former days was written for our instruction. The Scriptures are not a dead record of the past; they were written with us in view, to teach, sustain, and encourage God's people in every age. Help students grasp this living, abiding purpose.

Draw out what Scripture is for. Paul names two gifts it gives: endurance and encouragement, which together produce hope. The Word is not given merely to fill our heads with information but to sustain us through hardship and to anchor our hope in God. When life is hard and faith grows weary, the Scriptures are the appointed means by which God strengthens us to keep going and lifts our eyes to the certain future he has promised.

Affirm the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, consistent with the church's high view of the Word. Paul treats the written Scriptures as God's own instruction, carrying his authority. Elsewhere he tells Timothy that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). We do not look for new revelations or fresh words from heaven; we have the complete and sufficient Word of God in the New Testament Scriptures, our final authority for faith and life.

Apply it. Ask students whether they are actually receiving the endurance and hope God means to give them through his Word, or whether their Bibles sit mostly closed while they look elsewhere for comfort. The Scriptures are God's appointed channel of hope; to neglect them is to starve the very endurance we long for. Encourage a concrete, renewed engagement with the Word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Scriptures written in former days for the instruction of God's people in every age (Romans 15:4)

- Endurance, encouragement, and hope as gifts God gives through his Word
- The full inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture for faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The completed New Testament as our final authority, with no need of new revelation today (Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:3)
- The Word as God’s appointed means of sustaining and forming his people (Psalm 119:50, 105)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Scriptures were written with us, not just their first readers, in view?
- How do endurance and encouragement from the Word produce hope in hard times?
- Are you receiving the hope God offers through Scripture, or looking elsewhere for it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Consider your own intake of the Word. Where are you starving the very endurance and hope God means to give you by neglecting the Scriptures, and where is a present struggle actually a place God wants to teach you through his Word? Name one concrete change.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses verse 4 into the student’s actual habits. Many Christians long for hope and endurance while neglecting the very means God has appointed to supply them. We are spiritually weary, yet our Bibles go largely unread; we look for encouragement in a dozen lesser places while the Word that was written to sustain us sits closed. Help students see the connection between their neglect and their dryness without shaming them.

Connect Scripture to present struggle. Paul ties the Word directly to endurance in hardship. Whatever a student is currently walking through, an illness, a strained relationship, a discouragement, a temptation, the Scriptures are the place God means to meet and teach them in it. Encourage students to bring their actual struggle to the Word, asking what God would teach and how he would encourage them, rather than treating Bible reading as a duty disconnected from real life.

Turn toward a concrete change. The aim is not vague resolve to read more but a specific, realistic step. A set time each day, a plan to read through a Gospel, a return to gathering with the saints where the Word is taught, a memorized passage to carry into a hard moment. Ask each student to name one concrete change in how they take in the Word, so that they stop starving the endurance and hope God is eager to give.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Word as the appointed means of endurance and hope, neglected to our own loss (Romans 15:4)
- God's design to teach and sustain his people through Scripture in their trials (Psalm 119:50)
- The danger of seeking comfort in lesser places while neglecting the Word
- Concrete, intentional habits of taking in Scripture as part of faithful discipleship

Discussion Prompts

- How might your spiritual weariness be connected to a neglect of the Word?
- What present struggle could become a place God teaches you through Scripture?
- What is one concrete, realistic change you will make in how you take in the Word?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul concludes, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). How did Christ accept us, and how does measuring our acceptance of one another by his acceptance of us guard us from both cold rejection on one side and a soft tolerance that abandons holiness on the other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so give it room. Everything in the passage has been moving toward this command, and the command comes with a measure and a goal. The measure is "just as Christ accepted you," and the goal is "in order to bring praise to God." Help students see that Christian acceptance is not defined by our culture's ideas of tolerance but by the way Christ welcomed us.

So how did Christ accept us? Not when we were impressive, agreeable, or sorted out, but while we were still weak, ungodly, and his enemies (Romans 5:6–10). He welcomed us at infinite cost, the cost of his own blood. His acceptance was warm, full, and undeserved; he did not wait for us to clean ourselves up before he received us. This is the measure. When a brother or sister is difficult, immature, or different from us, we are to welcome them with the same costly, undeserved warmth with which Christ welcomed us. That guards us against cold rejection, against keeping people at arm's length until they meet our standards.

But Christ's acceptance also guards us against soft tolerance, and this is crucial to hold. Christ accepted us as we were, but he never intended to leave us as we were. He welcomed us in order to make us holy, to wash us, to transform us into his likeness (Ephesians 5:25–27; Titus 2:11–14). His acceptance was never indifference to our sin; it cost him the cross precisely because our sin was deadly serious. So acceptance in the church is not approving whatever a brother believes or does, nor abandoning the call to godly living. It is a warm welcome of the person joined to a loving commitment to their growth in holiness, exactly as Christ welcomed and is sanctifying us.

Bring out the goal: “in order to bring praise to God.” When a congregation of very different people, who would never naturally belong together, genuinely welcomes one another across every line, it puts the reconciling power of the gospel on display and brings glory to God. The world cannot explain such unity except by the cross. Ask students to name the brother or sister they have been keeping at a distance, and what it would look like to welcome them as Christ welcomed them, warmly and fully, yet without ever softening the shared call to holiness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s acceptance of us while we were weak, ungodly, and his enemies (Romans 5:6–10)
- Acceptance modeled on Christ’s costly, undeserved welcome, not on the world’s tolerance (Romans 15:7)
- Christ welcoming us as we were in order to make us holy, never leaving us as we were (Ephesians 5:25–27; Titus 2:11–14)
- Acceptance that guards against both cold rejection and a soft tolerance that abandons holiness
- The unity of a diverse, welcoming church as a display of the gospel to the glory of God (John 17:21–23)
- The call to godly living held together with the warm welcome of the brother (Romans 6:1–4)

Discussion Prompts

- How did Christ accept us, and what does that demand of how we accept one another?
- How does Christ’s acceptance guard us against both cold rejection and a holiness-abandoning tolerance?
- Whom have you kept at a distance, and what would welcoming them as Christ welcomed you look like?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Romans 15:1–7 as a whole: bearing with the weak, not pleasing ourselves, Christ as our model, the Scriptures giving hope, and accepting one another for the glory of God. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow in welcoming his people through this passage, and what concrete step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson into one concrete commitment. Resist the urge to let it stay general. “I want to be more accepting” is a wish, not a step. Help students name a specific theme from the passage, a specific person, and a specific action they will take this week.

Encourage them to connect their answer to whatever pressed on their heart most. For one student it may be “bear with the failings of the weak” and a call to come underneath a

struggling brother's burden. For another it may be "even Christ did not please himself" and a call to lay down a cherished preference. For another it may be the Scriptures as the source of hope and a call to return to the Word, or "accept one another as Christ accepted you" and a call to welcome a particular person they have held at arm's length. Let the text drive the application.

Close by lifting their eyes back to Christ. The goal of this study is not behavior modification but becoming like Jesus, who did not please himself but welcomed us at the cost of his blood. Remind students that the same gospel of God's mercy that has filled the letter to the Romans is the power that produces this welcoming love in us, and that a church which accepts one another as Christ accepted them brings praise to God. Send them out not with a heavy burden but with a clear next step and a confident hope that Christ, who welcomed them first, is forming them to welcome others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel of God's mercy in Christ as the source and power of welcoming love (Romans 15:7; 5:8)
- Growing conformity to Christ, who did not please himself, as the goal of the Christian life (Romans 8:29)
- Personal, specific obedience as the proper response to God's Word (James 1:22)
- Christ as both the pattern and the power of the acceptance he commands, to the glory of God

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of Romans 15:1-7 pressed on your heart most, and why?
- What is the one specific step of welcome you will take this week, and toward whom?
- How will you rely on Christ, who welcomed you first, rather than your own willpower?