

Bellflower

Grace Communion International

Worship Services: Saturdays 10:00 a.m.

at The First Christian Church

17003 Clark Avenue

Bellflower, CA 90706-5721

gcibellflower.org

Larry Dietrich, Senior Pastor

Pastor's LETTER

“Jesus’ Acceptance”

Greetings to You All,

Christians often joyfully proclaim that “Jesus accepts everyone” and “does not judge anyone.” Though there is gospel truth in these affirmations, I find that people assign to them a wide range of different meanings. Unfortunately, some of those meanings seem to differ from the revelation of Jesus that is given to us in the New Testament.

In GCI circles, we often use the phrase, “You’re included.” That simple statement conveys an important point. But it too can be (and has been) understood in a variety of ways. What exactly are we included in? Answering this and related questions calls for care as we, in faith, seek to sort out the related issues so that we are accurate and thus faithful to the biblical revelation.

Jesus certainly did welcome all into his presence and offered himself and his teaching to all who came toward him. In fact, he told his listeners that he would draw all persons to himself (John 12:32). Indeed, we find no instances where Jesus rejected someone, turning away from or refusing someone who was seeking him out. More than that, Jesus received and even shared meals with the sorts of people who were being rejected by many of the religious leaders of his day.

What stands out in the biblical record is the fact that Jesus welcomed and interacted with lepers, the lame, blind, deaf and dumb. He interacted socially with women (some with questionable reputations) and did so in ways that ignored religious regulations of the day. Jesus also spent time with adulterers, with Jewish tax collectors working under Roman direction, and even with fanatical anti-Roman political activists.

Furthermore, Jesus spent time with the Pharisees and Sadducees, religious leaders who were his most severe critics (including some who plotted his execution). The apostle John tells us that Jesus did not come to condemn, but to save and rescue people for God. Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). He also instructed his disciples to love their enemies (Luke 6:27), forgive those who wronged them and bless those who cursed them (Luke 6:28). Jesus also extended forgiveness to his executioners at the moment of his crucifixion (Luke 23:34).

What comes across in these examples is that Jesus came to benefit all—he was “on the side” of everyone, he was “for” everyone. He is God’s grace and God’s salvation for all. The rest of the New Testament outside of the Gospels summarizes what we see lived out in Jesus’ life. Paul indicates that Jesus came to atone for the sins of the ungodly, the sinners—those “dead in their sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

The attitude and acts of Jesus clearly demonstrate God’s love for all human beings and his desire to be reconciled to all and to bless all. Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly (John 10:10 NRSV). God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus came as a ransom to free captives of sin—their own and the evil done against them.

Larry

