



## “All Are Welcome”

Ephesians 2:11-19

**Idea:** The church welcomes all because Jesus has welcomed all through His sacrifice upon the cross.

**Intro:** Ryan was in his late twenties when he really began to sense there was something missing in his life. He had almost no church background, but what little he did have led him to consider finding a church home. He tried his best to put off the ever-growing sense that there was something missing from his life, but after several months, it was still there. So he approached his wife Bethany and asked if she and their two young daughters would go to church with him.

Bethany had a nominal church background, but she was not really interested in going back to church. She found the world outside the church more pleasant than church life. She nevertheless agreed to go with Ryan “just one time.”

They agreed to visit a church close to the neighborhood where they lived. They pulled up the church’s website to learn about the ministries and service times. Unfortunately, they found

several items on the site outdated and very little that was helpful for a first-time guest.

On Sunday morning the family of four pulled onto the church's campus fifteen minutes late even though they thought they were arriving on time. Because they arrived late, church members occupied all the closer parking spots. Supposedly, there were guest parking spots, but Ryan could not find any directional signs to them.

When they walked into the foyer of the worship center late, a couple of front door greeters spoke to them for at least two seconds before resuming their private conversation, oblivious to the world and people around them. Somehow Ryan and Bethany found their way to the children's area. If their experience wasn't already bad, this is when disaster struck. The place was dirty. Security was weak. And the person that met them complained because they were late!

Bethany gave Ryan "the look." It was not a happy moment. It's surprising they even went into the worship service at this point. They both realized they had made a bad decision. It seemed obvious to them that they weren't really welcome at this church.

Have you had an experience like this? Have you felt unwelcome at church before? If you have been to enough churches, you have probably had a similar experience...but why? How is it possible for a person to feel unwelcome at the one place in a community where he or she should feel most welcome? It happens, and it happens not just to the laity.

I heard about a visiting preacher who was preaching a series of revival meetings at a church in west Texas. The preacher was concerned when he began the first night of the revival meeting and noticed all of the men wearing guns. Although rattled, he did the best he could with his sermon. When finished, his anxieties heightened as several of the men approached with their guns drawn. In panic, he turned to the chairman of deacons, sitting next to him. The deacon calmed his fears:

“Don’t you worry. They ain’t coming after you. They’re looking for the cuss who invited you to preach.”

Well, isn’t that reassuring and welcoming?

**Inquiry:** We are in a series on biblical hospitality that we’re simply calling “Welcome.” The meta-narrative of Scripture is that God has invited and welcomed sinful strangers into a redemptive relationship with Himself. Jesus said, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28). The word “all” in the Greek (πᾶς) means all. In the Lord all are welcome. It is here that we learn a great truth.

**Biblical Truth:** We are to welcome the stranger because God in Jesus Christ has welcomed us as strangers.

God welcomes all strangers. Therefore, we are to welcome all strangers because God has welcomed us. This is the subject I want to speak to this morning...“All Are Welcome.”

Read Ephesians 2:11-19.

There are three realities in this passage that we need to know in order to better understand and practice biblical hospitality.

### **1. Sin Separates** (vs. 11-12)

Sin separates man from God (Is 59:2; Rom 3). The Bible teaches that God created mankind for a relationship. He used to walk with Adam in Eden during the cool of the day. God enjoyed the company of Adam and Eve, and they enjoyed the fellowship they had with God. It was a beautiful and wonderful relationship right up until the day, Adam and Eve chose to sin. At the moment they ate from the forbidden tree, the relationship they had enjoyed with God was severed.

The Bible teaches that everyone, both Jew and Gentile, is separated from God because of sin (Rom 3:9). Sin has made us strangers to the God who created us to be in relationship with Himself.

Sin also separates man from man. Today, is the one-year anniversary of the horrific incident that took place in Charlottesville as a group composed of mostly white supremacists clashed with counter protesters and Antifa demonstrators. In that uproar a 32-year-old woman was killed and nineteen others were injured when a car plunged into a crowd of protesters.

The separation that sin creates is the cause behind the racial tension that we see in our culture today. Even in this passage we find a hint of ethnic tension (vs. 11). It is the cause behind the murders and violence. It is the cause behind the growing sex trafficking industry in our nation. It is what fuels the abuse of women and children. It is the undercurrent that breaks up marriages and splits families. It is the root of all separation in life.

Sin separates! It separates you from God, and it separates you from one another. Thankfully, that is not the whole story. The Bible makes it clear that while sin separates, God welcomes. And He welcomes all.

## **2. Grace Unites (vs. 13-16)**

Our sin and separation may be great, but God's grace is greater. Paul told these Ephesian Gentiles that though they had been far off from God, He had brought them near through the shed blood of Christ. The penal and sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross had atoned for the sin that separated the Ephesians from God. Jesus had made peace with God the Father for them.

Today, the shed blood of Jesus also makes peace with God the Father for us. We don't deserve the

forgiveness of sin and the relationship He offers; it is grace. It is grace that unites us to God.

Likewise, it is the grace of God that unites us together with our fellow man. Paul makes the case that there is no longer Jew and Gentile. In Christ there is one new man in place of the two (2:15). Therefore, all are welcome...Jew and Gentile. All are welcome...rich, poor, educated, uneducated, cultured, uncultured, religious, unreligious, black, white, and every ethnicity. It doesn't matter who you are. God welcomes all. Therefore, His church should welcome all. His grace unites us.

### **3. Love Receives (vs. 17-19)**

In Christ, God welcomes you as His children. You have been adopted into the family of God. Therefore, you possess all the rights and privileges that come with being a child of God. We have an Abba...a Daddy who loves and receives us.

In Christ, we also welcome others as brothers and sisters. We should lovingly receive others. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matt 19:19). And it shouldn't matter who the person is or what the person is like.

Because of the love of Christ our church should look like our community. It is an atrocity that Sunday morning in the local church is the most segregated place in America. There should be different ethnicities represented in our church. We should see alcoholics, drug addicts, and every kind of broken individuals. After all we are all broken people. Therefore, all are welcome in God's church.

All are welcome at Red Lane because:

- We want you to experience the love of Christ.

We believe in Jesus Christ. We believe He is the Savior of the world. That is why we gather and worship at this church. Quite frankly, that is why we do what we do. There are many good organizations out there. And many of them are doing a great job serving others and helping others. We are grateful for those organizations.

But churches are different. We do all we do because we love Christ. We know His love. We have experienced His love. We have given our lives to Him.

You may already be a Christian. That is great. We hope that you can continue to experience the love of Christ at RLBC. Serving and loving Christ was never meant to be a solo effort. It was meant to be shared with fellow believers.

Maybe you're not a Christian. Perhaps you have questions or doubts. We are here to show you Jesus. We want you to experience the love of Christ. It is transforming, forgiving, and life-changing.

- We want to serve you.

Everyone has needs. Everyone has hurts at points in his or her life. Everyone has questions too.

We really love serving people and meeting needs. We would really love to serve you.

What is your need today? Do you have questions about marriage, children, and family? Have you experienced the pain of loss?

You will find at RLBC a number of people who find it a great joy to serve others.

- We want you to make a difference.

Yes, we want to serve you, but we want you to make a difference too.

Big adventures with God often begin with small steps. The Lord has brought you here for a reason. There is a difference He intends for you to make in and through the life of RLBC. The story is still being written.

- We want to get to know you.

There is really something special when people get to know one another. They learn about their families, their hopes, their dreams, their fears, and their hurts.

As a church, we are family. We love one another. We want to know one another. We are not satisfied that you simply attend worship and then go home. We believe you need more. We believe you need to be in relationship with other believers. You can't really do that if you only attend worship. You need to be in a small group. You need to know others and have them know you.

Spiritual growth happens best in the context of a small group.

- We like you.

I think it is possible to love someone without liking them. We not only love you; we like you. We want to spend time with you. You see we like you

because we know that God loves you. And we like you because we love people the way God loves them: unconditionally.

**Conclusion:** Do you remember Ryan, Bethany, and their two daughters? The church they visited left a lasting impression on them. Regrettably, it wasn't a very welcoming church. The people there showed little to no care for their guests. Therefore, the church made an impression that very well could have impacted this family for all eternity.

How different would their visit to church have been if the church had welcomed them with the love, tenderness, and intentionality of Jesus? How different would their future have been? God was definitely working in Ryan's heart, but rather than fanning the flame He was kindling, the church snuffed it out.

Church we must never allow that to happen at Red Lane. We must never allow that to happen in our own personal lives. We must be the kind of Christ-follower who welcomes all kinds of people. We must fight against the tendency to talk and hang out with only other people like ourselves. We must seek out the stranger, the guest, and the one who needs a friend. We must include them in our lives and huddles. We must be a church who embraces and welcomes all people. After all, that is the reason we are here.