

the back page – Sheth LaRue, Senior MDiv

Growing up in and around the church, I was no stranger to the potluck. Before me on the tables was twenty-four feet of mystery food: cream of \_\_\_\_\_ used as casserole binding agents...vegetables in various stages of preparation...what did Esther put in her meatloaf...it was a gastronomic gamble.

What I loved about these potlucks was that they were similar to the Biblical lovefeasts - times for believers to gather and share a common meal. People certainly ate their fill, but they also talked about their lives and shared their stories. We see these lovefeasts a few times in the New Testament (1 Cor 11:20-43; Jude 12; 2 Pet 2:13), mostly when the text's authors are admonishing the participants for being greedy, impatient, and unwelcoming.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul was dealing with these exact issues. He had known about the Christian community's ill treatment of one another and had written to gently coax them towards a better way of living. In an effort to inform and educate the community, Paul used the word προσλαμβάνεσθε (proslambanesthe) in 14:1 and 15:7 – this word's root is defined: “to receive or accept in one's society, in(to) one's home or circle of acquaintances.”[1] This definition, like blueberry pie at the potluck, is pretty filling, but not great. But I think this gets more to the heart of what Paul was saying: “to receive kindly or hospitably, admit to one's society and friendship, treat with kindness.”[2] This definition is like the fresh, warm chicken breast at the bottom of the KFC bucket – it's got meat on it and tastes good as I chew on it.

Paul could have easily used δέχομαι (dechomai) when he said that the Romans should welcome/accept one another, but he chose the more intense προσλαμβάνεσθε. Paul didn't want the community to simply say hi and shake a hand; he wanted them to bring others in, give them a place at the table, and treat them as life-long friends. Paul isn't suggesting that the Romans welcome one another, he is commanding that they make this welcoming and receiving a habitual practice, and that they do it immediately.

As we begin this new academic year, I pray that we all can “Accept [προσλαμβάνεσθε] one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7, NIV). These words were written to the Romans, but I think we can put them into practice. Where can we find spaces to receive others in? What does it look like to have a common meal? How can we meet together in friendship and kindness? When can we invite others to our Lord's table to join in the great lovefeast that has been set before us?

May we always welcome people with haste, may we generously pour out our kindness, and may we do them with loving intensity.

much love. sheth.

[1] William F. Arndt, et. al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 717.

[2] “προσλαμβάνω” Bill Mounce, accessed 9/4/2019, <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/proslambano>