

Rooted Simply Word Study: Acceptance vs. Approval



Definitions & Core Meanings

Acceptance

Root idea: To receive, welcome, or acknowledge the inherent worth of a person.

Biblical resonance: Hospitality, compassion, recognition of shared humanity.

Greek parallels:

Proslambanō — “to receive, welcome, take to oneself” (Romans 14:1, 15:7).

This word emphasizes **embracing a person**, not endorsing their behavior.

Approval

Root idea: To endorse, agree with, or affirm that something is good, right, or worthy.

Biblical resonance: Moral discernment, testing, and evaluating.

Greek parallels:

Dokimazō — “to test, examine, approve after testing” (Romans 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

This word emphasizes **evaluating actions or beliefs**, not people.

In short:

Acceptance is about the person.

Approval is about the behavior.

These two are not the same—and Scripture never treats them as interchangeable.

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How Scripture Distinguishes the Two

Jesus Accepted People Without Approving Their Sin

He welcomed:

tax collectors, adulterers, the demon-possessed, the unclean, the outcasts

But He never once approved of sin. His pattern was:

Come to Me (acceptance)

Go and sin no more (non-approval)

Acceptance opened the door. Truth transformed the life.

Paul Teaches the Same Distinction

“Accept (*proslambanō*) one another, just as Christ accepted you” (Romans 15:7).

“Test (*dokimazō*) everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Paul commands **acceptance of people** and **discernment of actions**—side by side.

Why Christians Confuse Acceptance and Approval

Because we live in a culture that says:

“If you don’t approve of my choices, you don’t love me.”

“Disagreement equals rejection.”

But biblically:

Love is unconditional. Approval is conditional. Acceptance is relational. Approval is moral.

God Himself models this:

He **accepts us** in Christ (Ephesians 1:6).

He does **not approve** of everything we do (Hebrews 12:5–11).

If God can separate the two, so can we.

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What Acceptance Looks Like (Biblically)

Acceptance means:

- treating someone with dignity
- listening without hostility
- showing compassion
- offering hospitality
- recognizing their value as an image-bearer
- being patient with their journey
- loving them where they are

Acceptance is **relational posture**, not moral endorsement.

What Approval Looks Like (Biblically)

Approval means:

- affirming something as good
- agreeing with a belief or behavior
- supporting a choice
- celebrating an action
- endorsing a lifestyle

Approval is **moral agreement**, not relational love.

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How Christians Can Love Without Approving

Follow Jesus' Pattern

He loved fully. He spoke truth clearly. He never confused the two.

Hold to Both Grace and Truth

John 1:14 says Jesus came “full of grace and truth.” Not half grace, half truth. Full of both.

Grace = acceptance. Truth = moral clarity.

Remember That Love Does Not Equal Agreement

1 Corinthians 13 never says:

Love affirms everything

Love celebrates all choices

Love avoids conflict

Instead, it says:

Love rejoices in the truth

Love bears, believes, hopes, endures

Love is strong enough to disagree.

Keep the Door of Relationship Open

Acceptance keeps the heart soft. Non-approval keeps the conscience clean.

Let the Holy Spirit Do the Convicting

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We are called to:

love, pray, speak truth when invited, walk in integrity

We are **not** called to:

control, coerce, convict, change hearts

That's the Spirit's work.

A Simple Way to Say It

Acceptance says: "I see you. I value you. You matter."

Approval says: "I agree with your choices."

Christian love says: "I can accept you without approving of everything you do, because that's exactly how God loves me."

Why This Matters for Christian Living

When we confuse acceptance with approval:

we either compromise truth or we withdraw love

But when we distinguish them:

we can love boldly, we can stand firmly, we can reflect Christ accurately

This is the balance that makes Christian love both powerful and transformative.