

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for November 27: Does your life speak well of God?**

November 15, 2011

In our passage this week, we see a clear description of God's plan for community. The issue is how we live, work and worship with each other. How do we bring people of diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, economic persuasions, educational opportunities and ages together into a united, loving, God-glorifying community? With so many differences tempting us to break apart, what is necessary to keep us together?

Earlier in Romans, the Apostle Paul addressed the primary motivation for Christian unity: Jesus. Now, at the end of his letter, believers are encouraged to live together in unity for the glory of God. Paul's letter offers the practical advice that those who are strong in faith "ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (15:1). Compare this with Philippians 2:1-4 and Matthew 7:1-12.

The relational commitment to look out for others and not for our own pleasures is the key to community in the kingdom of God. This commitment unfolds on two levels: human and divine.

On the human level, we each look out for one another and not for ourselves, and we trust others will look out for us. This parallels our relationship with God in which we look out for God's glory rather than our own, trusting God will look out for our glory (v. 3). Furthermore, our communal unity on a human level becomes one of the primary ways we bring glory to God (vv. 5-6).

These principles are broad but profound, and as such, they can be

uncomfortable. Personally, I am more comfortable with this commitment as it unfolds on the divine level. I appreciate the love of the Father and the sacrifice of the Son who suffered my penalty that I might enjoy eternal life.

I understand, too, that in joining myself through faith to this grace that God revealed, I now have a responsibility to live, not for myself, but for God. I am no longer my own (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). I am to live in such a way that God is glorified, and God, in turn, has given me the unbelievable promise that he will glorify me together with his Son.

I consider that God is much better at looking out for my glory than I am at looking out for his. Moreover, God is much better at looking out for my glory than I am at looking out for my glory. God's gift to me is incredibly rich, and the more I think about it, the richer I find it.

The relational commitment on the human level is more troublesome for me. I have identified the problem as a matter of trust. I trust God to look out for my glory. I do not, necessarily, trust my neighbor to look out for me.

Yet this is what God has called me to do. Just as he was willing in love to give an incredibly lopsided gift to me (by which I mean I receive much more than I am able to return), so I must be willing in love to give an incredibly lopsided gift to fellow believers. I must be willing to look out for their best interests, even if I do not think they will look out for mine.

Indeed, I must go farther. If I am to model my life after the life of Jesus, then I must be willing to not only be short-changed with regard to personal glory, I also must be willing to suffer insults and hardship on their behalf. In God's plan for community, I am not excused from my responsibility to work for the good of others just because they are not looking out for my good.

It is in this faithful and persistent practice of self-mortification for the sake

of others that the Christian community is built and made useful for bringing praise to God (v. 7). It is through such love that the community of Christ acts as the body of Christ on earth, following in the steps of our Master.

Consider how transformative such a vision can be. We live in a culture in which work merely is a means of personal gain. But what if I applied the principle of looking out for others before myself? Might I not come to the biblical conclusion that I work not merely to enrich myself but so I might have something to share with those who are in need (Ephesians 4:28)?

We live in a culture where the right to choose what pleases us has been given primary importance. This carries over into our ideas of justice and morality and perverts them both. It carries over into our relationships so that husbands and wives no longer are committed to each other but to gratifying their own needs.

It carries over to the church so that we now choose churches not based on where God might want us but on the basis of what we want to receive from God. We separate our worship experiences by age and ethnicity and musical culture so we might feel more comfortable.

But what if I applied the principle of looking out for others first? Might I not end up expressing the sentiments of Paul in Romans 15? Might I not look for a community drawn together out of all the diversity in the world rather than separated into comfortable categories?