

## DOES YOUR LIFE SPEAK WELL OF GOD?

Romans 15:1-13

We see and hear on the news programs situations in which a person does (or is accused of doing) something that is out of character and inappropriate. Such disclosures harm the reputations of the person and the organizations with which he or she is associated. Basically, we (both individually and as a society) have expectations of behavior for people who are in certain positions and associations. Years ago, our parents would make an appeal to us to behave properly to avoid getting into trouble and to avoid hurting the reputation of the family. Most organizations have written and unwritten expectations of behavior for those who are members and sometimes people will be censured or expelled if they have behaviors that are harmful to the reputation of the organization.

Are such concerns legitimate? Should we alter or “be careful” of our behavior so that we present a good picture to those who are watching so that we do not harm reputations? As with many such questions, the answer is “yes” and “no.” The “no” part of this answer is related to the fact that all of us realize that hypocrisy is wrong and that “the right thing to do” is to “do the right thing” and not just pretend. The “yes” would apply to the fact that, in spite of our best efforts to do the right thing, our actions and motives can be misinterpreted by others. Therefore, care is needed to guard our reputations and the reputations of those with whom we are associated.

In the Old Testament accounts of the nation of Israel, we find the prophets of God warning the people to be careful to not “profane” the name of God. These appeals were generally related to their behavior that was contrary to the commandments and precepts that God had given to them. They were known as the “people of God.” Should this be a concern for us today in the church? Think about how we describe the church. In Paul's writings we discover that the church is described as the “sons of God,” the church is the “bride of Christ,” it is the “army of God,” as members of the church we are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” we are “God's workmanship,” the “temple of God,” and the “body of Christ.” In each one of these descriptions we see a reference to God and this relationship has significant benefits to us, but it also carries with it significant responsibilities to God and to each other. If we behave in ways that are contrary to showing preference for others, living in harmony with each other, accepting others, and having hope, then our lives do not speak well of the church and of who God is.

### Prefer Others - 15:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.” <sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15:1-4 (NASB95)

Paul began chapter 14 with mention of those who are “weak” in the faith. In this next part of his letter, he specifically referenced those who are “strong” in faith. It is important that we understand what is meant by strong and weak in the context of this passage. We could argue that all of us are “weak” in an absolute sense compared to where we could or should be in our relationship to God. We sometimes have a tendency to think that our beliefs with regard to matters of conscience are correct. Hopefully, if we did not believe that, then we would change what we believe. That raises the question of “can we really change what we believe?” Yes we

can. This is what being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” is all about. When we come into a better understanding of the truth, then what we believe about certain things should change.

Those who were described as “weak” were those who were hanging onto certain “religious” practices in an effort to be pleasing to God. In effect, they had not come into a full appreciation of the fact that observance of rituals and religious practices and observance of holy days has nothing to do with our being acceptable to God. Do we find ourselves doing things that would fall into the category of “religious observances” and have the idea that we are doing this to be pleasing or even acceptable to God? Examples might be: mandatory daily Bible reading, saying prayer before you go to sleep, thinking you cannot eat a meal without saying grace, refusal to drink anything with alcohol in it, not going to the movies, refusing to go to the beach, not wearing cosmetics, using only the King James Version of the Bible, making people stand up when you read Scriptures, not going to a restaurant on Sunday, etc. Notice that the activities listed tend toward things that are considered by many to show greater piety.

The problems that arose in the early church seem to have resulted from those who did not have such issues of conscience (the strong) being critical of and insensitive to those who did have such concerns. We seem to have gotten around some of these differences of opinion on the local church level by physically separating ourselves into different groups or sects or what we call denominations. We have avoided the friction by isolating ourselves into separate groups. We really have not dealt with the issues but have implemented avoidance. As a consequence the “church” is weaker as a whole.

Paul encouraged the church at Rome to not be selfishly driven but to show sensitivity and consideration for others. The motivation for this approach was not just to avoid controversy but was for the purpose of helping the other group so they could grow and be built up in the faith. Now, does that mean we should go along with anything and everything people do and the only criterion being to “please our neighbor?” Absolutely NOT! The criterion is that it must be for his GOOD and to BUILD HIM UP. There is a lot of difference in just ignoring what your neighbor is doing and/or accommodating your actions to please him “no matter what” and feeling an obligation to do things that are in his best interest.

Another reason for not exercising your freedom in Christ without consideration of that exercise on others is the example given to us by Jesus: “For even Christ did not please himself.”

Jesus did not seek his own ease, pleasure, profit, honor, and glory, but to do his Father’s will and work (John 4:34). He always did the things which pleased the Father, in his obedience, sufferings, and death; and He did not seek his own, but God’s glory. This is number one priority. We must make sure that whatever we do, that we are pleasing to the Lord. After we have satisfied that requirement, then the other things that do not matter to God can be addressed.

As we continue to look at the example of Jesus, we see the following: what he did and suffered for were not for himself, but **for us**; he became incarnate **for us**; he obeyed, suffered, and died **for us**; he came not to be ministered to, and treated as an earthly prince, enjoying his own ease and pleasure, but **to minister to others** (Mt 20:28). He appeared in the form of a servant, did the work of a servant in life, and at last became obedient to death, even the death of the cross (Ph 2:7,8).

Of course, when we follow Christ’s example, people will think very highly of us, they will respect us and give us all sorts of compliments. Right? Wrong!! We see in the second part of verse three, “but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’”

We can expect to be treated as Christ was treated. He was scorned, insulted and

crucified. Yet, He did not back away from what He was to do.

What is the typical reaction of most church members today when they are involved in the work of the church and someone criticizes them? “If they don’t appreciate what I do, then I just won’t do anything else!” Is that what Jesus did? Absolutely NOT!

Paul reached back in prophetic history and pulled a verse from Psalms 69:9 to link the actions of Christ and the results He accomplished to what is expected of us and, by implication, the anticipated results that will come when we follow the example of Christ. Paul gave us an important truth regarding this in verse four. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Everything: All of scripture is important. We are not to just pick and choose the parts we like and ignore the rest. Sometimes our modern-day theology is the gospel according to Piccadilly. We treat the word of God as if it were a cafeteria. Jesus, Himself said, that we shall live by every word of God.

To Teach Us: What is the lesson from Psalms 69:9? We cannot expect to be treated any better than Jesus was treated. Another lesson: you will likely be unappreciated - so get used to it.

Endurance: We will **not** get the job done by giving up and retreating.

Encouragement of Scriptures: How do the scriptures encourage us? The promises of God are sure. Notice that Endurance and Encouragement work together – we need both. These work together to produce HOPE.

Hope is related to the promises of God – hope must be based on something. It is not just wishful thinking. But just knowledge of the promises does not produce hope unless it is combined with endurance. Dropping out and giving up does not fit into the normal Christian’s behavior. If we do *drop out and give up* then we have **no hope** and since faith is the substance of things **hoped for**, then our faith will be faulty. A faith that fails before the finish was faulty from the first.

### Live in Harmony - 15:5-6

<sup>5</sup> Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5-6 (NASB95)

It appears that these two verses have the emphasis switching to the relationships we have in the church with those who follow Christ. (Paul started out writing about those who were strong and weak in the faith and then he used the term neighbor which we expanded to include interaction with all people. That may be more than Paul intended, because he is now back to relationship among believers.)

We see benefit that comes from refusing to have our own way (to be pleasing to ourselves) in things that are not critical to salvation. That benefit is unity in the body of Christ. Unity in the body results in God being glorified.

How well does this work in the church? To varying degrees – it cannot work in the strength of self. Notice that “endurance” and “encouragement” are given to us by God. He is the Source of our endurance and encouragement. Notice that the “spirit of unity” is also a gift from God.

It is humbling to realize that all is of God, and we bring nothing to the party. He is the provider of all. I think we realize that even our faith is a gift from God (Eph 2:8-9). Now we see that the patience and consolation (endurance and encouragement) that lead to hope are also from God. Every need, He is providing!!

The manifestation of this unity is that we are of “one accord.” We see this translated as “one mind” and “one heart” but it all boils to all of us have the same purpose and that we articulate (one mouth) that purpose among ourselves and to the world around us. The result is that God will be glorified. Jesus told us in John 15:8 how the Father is glorified: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

We will not be bearing fruit (either the fruit or the Spirit or new souls born into the Kingdom of God) unless we can get over the petty differences that are sometimes nothing more than a source of pride to us and have little or no concern to God.

### Accept Others - 15:7-11

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. <sup>8</sup>For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers, <sup>9</sup>and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.” <sup>10</sup>Again he says, “REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.” <sup>11</sup>And again, “PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.” Romans 15:7-11 (NASB95)

Paul came back, full circle to where he started in Chapter 14, verse 1. Accept one another and the ultimate reason is to bring praise and glory to God. Isn't that what it's all about? We bring glory to God by showing His love to our fellow man. To do that we must put self aside and make it of none effect – that's the work of the cross.

The conclusion is that we must receive and accept one another in the same way that Christ received and accepted us. This is a difficult thing to do - impossible - in our own strength. We know that the love that God showed to and for us in Christ is unconditional and it is complete and full. He gave His **all** and this worked to the glory of God. This is way we should love one another (unconditional, complete and full) and this is the purpose (the glory of God) for our doing it.

Jesus became a minister (servant) to the Jews so that the truth of the promises of God to the Gentiles could be confirmed. God had included all mankind in His eternal purposes when He created man in His own image. This purpose is accomplished only when salvation is available to everyone, Jews and Gentiles. This was not a new idea. The Old Testament had many references to God's intention to make His salvation available to all mankind. Paul quoted several of these passages to prove his point.

These quotations are taken from the three divisions of the Old Testament—“the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” and from three great Jewish heroes: Moses, David, and Isaiah. A progression of thought can be traced through the four quotations. In the first, David praised God among the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9); in the second, Moses exhorted the Gentiles, Rejoice . . . with His people (v. 10); in the third the psalmist commanded the Gentiles to praise the Lord (v. 11; cf. v. 7); and in the fourth, Isaiah predicted that the Gentiles will live under the rule of the Root of Jesse (the Messiah) and they will hope in Him (v. 12).

### Express Hope - 15:12-13

<sup>12</sup>Again Isaiah says, “THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.” <sup>13</sup>Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:12-13 (NASB95)

This is a prayer of Paul for the church. This prayer is answered as we walk in obedience to the word of God in the church. We will have in our relationship (both upward and outward) the joy and peace that come from knowing that we are doing what is pleasing to God. We will have continuing hope as we see the power of God through His Holy Spirit working in our lives.