

Romans 14:7-8

(7) For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. (8) For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

King James Version

This apostolic pronouncement, confirmed in numerous passages throughout the Bible, runs counter to the prevailing philosophy of this age. Our American society is built on the concept of individualism. Just a few centuries ago, people believed that "no man is an island," but over the intervening decades a spirit of personal independence has grown to become a central tenet that influences every facet of life.

Perhaps the last two remaining vestiges of the older way of thinking exist in family ties and teamwork, and both of these are slipping away at a frightening rate. Progressives have sought and succeeded in redefining family to include just about anyone living under a single roof, no matter how they might be related by blood or marriage—or not. As for teamwork, all one has to do is watch just about any team sport and the trend becomes readily apparent. Business has kept team spirit alive, but the fundamental reason for it comes down to individual profit.

It would be interesting to ask a significant sample of the population, "What do you live for?" The answers, of course, would be many and varied, but it is probable that they would boil down to a few major categories:

- Self
- Family
- Wealth

- Power
- Fame/Prestige
- Excitement/Risk/Adventure
- Knowledge
- Altruism/Philanthropy
- Nothing/Uncertain
- Spiritual/Religious Reasons

Obviously, some of these overlap or go hand-in-hand, but most of them are fundamentally self-centered and self-aggrandizing. Even "family," "altruism/philanthropy," and "spiritual/religious reasons" have selfish angles. Because we are human, we have a terribly hard time—perhaps an impossible one—extricating our baser selves from even our highest aspirations. In even the most altruistic among us is a desire to satisfy one's own desires.

Yet, through the apostle Paul, [God](#) lays down a guiding principle that human nature makes almost impossible to live up to: "We live to the Lord." Perhaps had God called us out of a culture of slavery, as those in the first century were, we would be better suited to do this. But He did not. He called us out of the most individualistic, materialistic culture that has ever existed on the planet, perhaps rivaled only by the days before the Flood ([Genesis 6:5](#)) and the chaotic period of Israel's judges when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" ([Judges 21:25](#)).

God must think that it is possible, even for us. This is not to say that it is easy. It takes [faith](#), courage, perseverance, and a great deal of vision to wrench one's thoughts, words, and actions out of the raging current of [this world](#) ([Ephesians 2:2](#)) and to paddle in the opposite direction. It is mentally and emotionally exhausting, and progress is often slow—and sometimes nonexistent and even retrograde! However, the effort is beneficial in itself, teaching us valuable lessons and building essential traits of character.

So, how are we doing?

Do we "do all to the glory of God" ([I Corinthians 10:31](#))? We should not consider this in just the major matters of life but in the minor details, for if we set our minds to honor God in the little matters, we will already be in the habit of doing so when the big ones arise (see [Luke 16:10](#)). As His

representatives on earth, it is vital that whoever observes us sees a reflection of Him in us.

Do we give "thanks always for all things to God" ([Ephesians 5:20](#))? In this day of rudeness and incivility, gratitude is a misunderstood and often undervalued virtue. However, gratitude teaches obligation and acknowledgement of providence. Being thankful keeps our minds trained on the fact that, without God, we would have nothing, and thus we owe Him our obedience as our kind Benefactor.

Do we "live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave Himself for [us]" ([Galatians 2:20](#))? [Living by faith](#) means that we follow Jesus' teaching no matter where it leads us because He owns us wholly and completely by His redemptive work. So, if God's Word says, "Come out from among them and be separate" ([II Corinthians 6:17](#)), we should be doing our very best to reject the anti-God practices of this world, no matter what they are and what may result. We do this because we implicitly trust our Savior.

Paul writes in [Philippians 1:21](#): "For to me, to live is Christ." Do we think this way? Do [Jesus Christ](#), His teaching, and His desires for us fill our lives to the extent that they *are* our lives? That is what Paul means: His every waking moment was lived with Christ foremost in mind: obeying Him, glorifying Him, thanking Him, pleasing Him. If we do this—if we *try* to do this—we will make great strides toward being prepared for ([Revelation 19:7](#)) and hastening ([II Peter 3:12](#)) the establishment of God's Kingdom.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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