



"A Practical Perspective of Community"  
Romans 12:9-13

**Idea:** The community we now experience is a reflection of the everlasting community that will be ours in eternity.

**Intro:** Why are you here today? Why are you a member or a regular attender of this church? What is it that you desire to find in this church? When was the last time you asked yourself questions like those?

Perhaps your answer is:

- "I enjoy the worship music."
- "I like the way the pastor preaches."
- "My children love the children's ministry."
- "I grew up in this church, and my family is here."
- "It is just something I have always done."

As we have examined the concept of biblical community, I hope that you have discovered that this is a critical issue for your life as a Christ-follower. The church is the way in which

the Lord Jesus is bringing us back into community with God and with one another. The Triune God who exists in perfect community as Father, Son, and Spirit created the universe. And so, creation bears His mark of community as every aspect of it has its counterpart. This is most beautifully seen in the creation of mankind. Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect community with God and with one another in the Garden until their rebellion. When they ate from the forbidden tree, they both died spiritually and physically. The community they enjoyed with God was destroyed, but God still pursued them. He covered their sin and promised that a Messiah would one day deal with their sin.

After Adam and Eve, God continued to pursue community with humanity as He called out Abram and through him established Israel as a people for Himself. Religious ritual and ceremony were never enough to reestablish community with God, so God the Son came to be with man and to die as a perfect sacrifice for man's sin. God the Son, Jesus Christ became the Messiah who was prophesied to Adam and Eve. Through His sacrifice upon the cross, community with God is reestablished and community with man can be made whole. The work, which Jesus accomplished on the cross and in the grave, made possible the restoration of man to the community for which he was created.

Individuals who repent of sin and place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ are brought into the household of God. They become part of the community of faith called the church, sharing a common life in Christ. They dwell in *community*. The believers who make up the church are a unified body of individuals who are one together in Jesus Christ.

The early church presents a beautiful picture of what this community looks like. We learn from Luke's depiction of the early church in Acts 2 that they understood and embraced community. They recognized that it was Christ alone who had brought them near to God. Their belief in the gospel message

ushered them into eternal community with the Godhead and with other believers. Jesus's disciples and those who were closely connected to him became the genesis of a multiplicity of small groups who met in the temple courts and homes throughout the city of Jerusalem. The early church became a community of communities who were interconnected and interdependent following Pentecost.

So why are you a part of this local church? Do you understand all that Jesus has done for you, and how He has brought you into the community of His body? There are two common misconceptions about community in the church that I regularly encounter. First, there is the idea that it is not important for a Christian to be a member and regular participant in a local church. My response to this idea is: "Sure, you can be a Christian without joining other Christians in the church. But it is like a soldier without an army, a seaman without a ship, a businessman without a business, a tuba player without an orchestra, a football player without a team, or a bee without a hive. It is at best abnormal, and it is at worst indicative of a regenerate heart."

Second, there is the idea that one's presence or absence doesn't really make a difference. The misconception here is that the believer is nothing more than a spectator who is watching the game rather than a player who is in the game. How successful would your favorite team be if a handful of the players, coaches, or equipment handlers decided they didn't feel like going to the game? Your team would not be successful if that was the attitude of a few members because it takes everyone, working together to win.

This morning, I want to conclude this sermon series by looking at some practical instructions that should guide our pursuit of biblical community.

**Inquiry:** Please take your Bibles, and turn with me to Romans 12. The apostle Paul penned this letter to the believers who were living in Rome. This letter is perhaps the most

theologically rich letter that Paul wrote. In it he spent the first eleven chapters unpacking the fullness and the glory of the gospel. Then in chapter 12, Paul moved to the believers' responses in light of the gospel, with the second half of the chapter containing some very practical but profound instructions that should guide the pursuit of community.

Read Romans 12:9-13.

From these verses I want to share with you four practical perspectives that should be present in our pursuit of biblical community.

### **1. Biblical community does not allow masks. (vs. 9)**

There is a call for authenticity. True, gospel-saturated community is authentic. The word (ἀνυπόκριτος) translated "genuine" means love is free of pretending, simulating, or acting. In other words, it is free of hypocrisy. It is not filled with easy answers that justify the spiritual expertise of those involved. Instead, this word calls for a sign to be hung over the doors of our hearts that reads, "No Masks Allowed."

Is this not how we must personally come to Jesus? We can't come to Him with anything but an open and honest heart, bearing our sin and shame. Biblical community should be approached in the same manner. Regular confession of sin, struggles, fears, and failures ought to be a common practice in the church. If you think about it, this makes sense, because an essential foundation of biblical community is the reality that we have all miserably fallen short of God's glory and perfect standard. We all struggle against the selfish desires and temptations of the flesh. Apart of Christ we are a mess. The only reason community exists is because of Jesus. It is definitely not because of anything you or I have done.

So why then do we pretend that everything is all right in our lives? If everything is built upon Jesus' righteousness, then why do we think we need to put on a mask and pretend? The gospel frees us to be authentic, to admit our struggles and strengths have not been fully sanctified, and to allow others to apply the grace of God to areas of our lives that desperately need it.

When community is honest and authentic, people begin to experience (and lead others to experience) freedom from wearing a mask because Jesus sets people free from the need to be hypocrites. He liberates religious overachievers controlled and dominated by a religious system they can never beat. He emancipates those shackled to their secrets by bringing light to darkness. He tears off the masks of the seemingly perfect and allows them to walk in the open. Authenticity in biblical community is personified as people come out of the shadows and find the grace of God to be sufficient for their sin.

We must be a community of faith that fosters a spiritual environment whereby people are coming out from the shadows of sin and finding freedom and new life in the light of the gospel of Christ.

## **2. Biblical community is safe, not soft. (vs. 9)**

The community in which we have been brought into through Christ acknowledges the presence of sin and welcomes the confession of sin. But that community never reduces the severity of sin. Paul instructs believers to "abhor what is evil." The word "abhor" means to "shiver in horror."

Illust: My first morning in India was met with no hot water in the shower. I have showered many times over seas without hot water, but this particular water was by

far the coldest I have experienced. It was a three minute shiver-fest.

The thought of another ice-cold shower makes me shudder. In much the same way, believers should shudder at things that go against God's revealed Word and purposes.

Within our biblical community we have a safe environment in which we can and should be honest about where we are because of the gospel. This does not mean, though, that we ever excuse our sin. If we are not careful, we can relish in our authenticity and freedom to expose our sin and struggles without ever working together to combat that sin. True biblical community lovingly nudges believers toward continual repentance – not just a bunch of “nobody’s perfect” confessions but actual, gospel-driven changes in lifestyle.

*1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? – Romans 6:1-2*

In these and the following verses Paul addressed a perceived theological loophole that some Roman Christians had found which allowed them to live in whatever fashion they wanted – and not only feel okay with it, but feel like they were doing God a favor. They thought that God's glory increased as His grace expanded in order to cover their growing sin. Paul instructed that this was not a proper response to God's grace. He instead reminded the Romans that when Jesus saves you, He also changes your attitude toward sin. Sin, then, doesn't become easier to commit; it becomes more despicable.

We must abhor sin both personally and collectively.

*6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend;*

*profuse are the kisses of an enemy.* – Proverbs 27:6

Abhorring evil in the context of community requires true love, and true love means there will be times when you wound a friend in order to help him. True love means that when we see someone in danger we don't turn away hoping that everything works out. We don't do this with our children. We don't let them play in the street. Neither should we watch believers walk into disastrous sin.

In our church and in our small groups, we must strive to create environments that are safe but never soft. We must strive to expose and eradicate sin from our lives. We must be willing to speak the truth and bring needed discipline but always in love.

### **3. Biblical community is filled with brotherly love. (vs. 10)**

“Brotherly affection” is comprised of two words: *philos* (brotherly love) and *adelphos* (of the same womb). Paul is speaking of something much deeper than sitting in a small group enjoying coffee together. Instead, Paul is saying that because of the gospel, we are called to possess a deep brotherly love for each other as if we were literally born from the same womb...which we were.

We, then, should view our brothers and sisters in Christ as brothers and sisters...as family. We should strive to honor one another because we are family. We are not just a collection of loosely connected relationships. We are the family of God. We are the body of Christ.

You may wonder how you can develop a loving affection for your fellow church members. I would say that the only way is to continue to look into the face of Jesus. Be consumed by His affection for you.

Illust: Families are often times a big mess. They grow in number and as they grow in number they grow in problems. What keeps a family together? It is the patriarch and the matriarch. My mom has a huge family. Our Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays were always a big deal when I was growing up. We would all pile in my grandparents house for lunch and to exchange presents. It was never a question of what my family would do or how we would treat one another as long as my grandparents were alive. However, since they have been gone, fewer and fewer family members get together during the holidays. One of the reasons is simply because the heads of the family are no longer present.

We will and can love our brothers and sisters in Christ when we are captivated by the love and grace of God.

#### **4. Biblical community seeks to meet the needs of others.**

According to Paul in verse 13, a true mark that community is being formed in the believer and the church is the warmth and hospitality supernaturally being poured out. Biblical community is grace-filled and loving.

There were Roman believers among the church in Rome who were without food and clothing. So what was the response of the church supposed to be? Paul's instruction was for the church to feed and cloth the needy. The truth, which motivated them to do this was the fact that Jesus had met their spiritual need. In response to Christ, they were to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters.

We are to do the same thing today. We should strive to assist others by meeting physical needs, while remembering that a good portion of people's needs are not physical but rather spiritual. Meeting the needs of



others means that those with less are invited to share in the joys and blessings of those who have more. This is so much more than a discussion about money. Meeting someone's needs could mean that men skilled in plumbing and carpentry share with those who are not. Parents who've raised children share wisdom with new parents. Professionals share their unique skills with those who need their expertise.

The early church understood what it meant to meet someone needs. They provided for each other so that no one had a need that wasn't being met by someone. Today, God continues to arrange community around each person in order to provide for the individual. He does this to take care of His children.

**Conclusion:** Community is an amazing thing. It begins with God and ends with God. The community we now experience is a reflection of the everlasting community that will be ours in eternity. Therefore, it must even now be savored, nurtured, fed, and invested in. We should never strive to do small groups and provide assistance divorced from the understanding that God desires to be in community with each person and desires for each person to be in community with one another. As Christ's church, we are OneTogether.