

GO

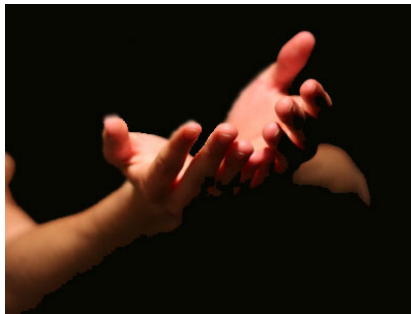
GO, GIVE, SERVE, AND SHARE.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

The Apostle Paul, quoted in his letter to the Christians in Rome – Romans 12:1

What a weird suggestion. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices? Doesn't sacrificing something mean killing it? How do we sacrifice ourselves and still live? And how does this compare with the sacrifices the ancient Hebrew people offered to God, which were likewise holy and pleasing to God? And even more, how does this constitute our "spiritual act of worship?" Doesn't worship mean singing and meeting together and reading the Bible together and that kind of thing?

These are all good questions raised by this passage, and we might not be able to do them all justice in this study, but we will hit this idea that self-sacrifice is worship and what it means to sacrifice ourselves and yet live. We will also consider some of the specific behaviors that constitute a sacrificed life. But first we will consider that learning to practice Paul's three central virtues – **faith**, **hope**, and **love** – together with other Christians constitutes his fourth virtue: **Unity**.



In the following passage, Paul talks about this virtue and, in 16 verses, ties together everything we've talked about so far and everything we have yet to discuss...

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord,

one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

~ Ephesians 4:1-16



GO 101

BETTER TOGETHER

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 again. Amen and amen! That passage says it all, doesn't it? First, Paul says L_____ right because you have been C_____. Then he says be H_____, G_____, and P_____ with one another. Then he encourages P_____ through U_____ -- one H_____, one L_____, one F_____, one B_____, one G____ and F_____ who is in and through *everything* (do you think unity matters?). Then he says Jesus gives G_____ of G_____ , different ones to different folks, so that God's people can be B_____ U____, M_____ and C_____ - like. This will help us stay F_____ and will prevent us from being D_____ allowing us to W_____ T_____ in U_____ to grow into a suitable B_____ for the head, who is J_____ .

Wow. Basically, it says we are called to live and love together as best we can in order to do the physical work of Jesus who is somehow both present in Spirit and absent in body, himself the first living sacrifice, who will be easier and easier to emulate the more and longer we join forces and seek to follow him together. That passage, together with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), pretty much sum up the life of the Christian and the purpose of the church. Add the Romans 12:1 passage about offering ourselves as a living sacrifice in order to worship God and we get a full bodied picture of worshipping God in the post-cross world.

The weird thing is that all of those bits of advice, all of those suggested behaviors, are a mash-up of two big purposes: WORSHIP and MISSION. Offer and sacrifice,



live and worship, love and work, build and grow, effort and Spirit, receive and attain. What we do and what God does are tied together. What we do for others and what we do for God are tied together. They are apparently so intertwined that we, as the church, must be sure we are not doing either one at the expense of the

other but rather always concerned with both. So in order to "GO" we should take a quick look at what each purpose is and how we are to live each purpose out.



Have you ever know the church to be too concerned with either worship or mission? What did that look like? What did they do about it?

WORSHIP

Worship our response to God as we recognize his work in our lives. At the beginning, you may only be able to "fake it 'til you make it," but, if we are striving toward virtue, as Paul has instructed, we will begin to see his involvement in our lives and be able to really celebrate and express it. Worship is giving voice to our **faith**, celebrating our **hope** and articulating our **love**. As we develop these virtues, we, as individual Christ followers, call out to the God who makes it possible for us to develop them – an expression of our dependence on him. But we also develop a fourth virtue through worship – **unity**.

Worship is also an expression of our call to royal priesthood. Whether we realize it or not, when we worship corporately, we are gathering the praises of

creation and presenting them before God's throne as we will in the new heaven and the new earth. This is because this was the purpose of the temple – the priests brought the offerings and presented them to God. Now we are the priests AND the temple, so when we gather to worship God, we bring the offerings of God's people and present them to God wherever we are.

When we gather to worship, we are to celebrate God's mighty acts of creation and covenant and *new* creation and *new* covenant. We should tell and re-tell this story – from creation through the exodus to God's promises and their fulfillment through Jesus Christ – and we should continually emphasize our part in the continuing story as it unfolds in our individual lives and the life of the church.

We do this by reading and singing Scripture. We do this by celebrating the "sacraments" (communion and baptism), as the visible, physical, concrete manifestations of the intersection of heaven and earth. We do this by collecting and telling the stories of God at work in the lives of his people. The specific ways we express these things may vary from group to group, but what is important is that we do it together. In unity. We work together to develop our faith, hope and love, and in this shared worship and striving, we learn this fourth and most vital virtue - unity.



If unity is indeed a virtue, what do you think that looks like? How should the desire for unity affect our Sunday worship services (if at all)?

UNITY

There is one thing that we must make clear now, before we go any further: *unity* is NOT the same thing as *uniformity*. In fact we are called away from uniformity...

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ~ Romans 12:4-5

We are not called to be boring clones of one another. The whole value of our developed unity is that it springs from our beautiful, God-designed diversity. And in building unity in diversity, we somehow become the "body of Christ." He is the head, and we are the body, royal priests running around doing the work of the King, all with different jobs, gifts, and responsibilities according to the "apportioning" of the "head," Jesus.

As we grow up in virtue and maturity, we do the work of faith, hope, and love, in unity, just as Jesus did when he walked the earth. As we follow Christ together, we can bring hope and healing to a lost and broken world.

MISSION

As we read Matthew 28:19-20, we see that God has a plan to reach all the nations (perhaps better translated "all people groups") through the actions of his followers. We're all invited to contribute; we all have a part in his plan.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ~1 Corinthians 12:27

Referring back to the Ephesians passage, we get a picture of the church working as God intends. Notice that "pastors and teachers" are given a clear responsibility to equip God's people to do God's work and build the church. Notice how every member of the body is a minister - we all share the responsibility of building Christ's church.

Also, it is no accident that Paul uses a human body, a living organism, to describe the workings of the church, rather than a physical building. Jesus spoke of buildings crumbling, but the church enduring, having been constructed of people rather than stone, and built on the foundation of Jesus not stone, and held in place by Jesus the cornerstone not actual stone. God's people are living stones formed not by a mason, but by the Spirit of God. Consequently, we do not behave like a machine that needs to be oiled and serviced or a building that needs to be patched and managed, but are rather more like an organism that requires nutrition and nurture and knowledge to function and grow and live. Consider the following passage...

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. ~ Ephesians 2:19-22

There's a humorous definition of a football game: a few people on the field who are desperately in need of rest, being watched by thousands of people in the stands who are desperately in need of exercise. Unfortunately, this could describe many churches. Instead, God desires every believer to be actively involved in the game. Imagine the impact if every member of every church was committed to doing their share of the work of the kingdom!

➡ How does seeing yourself as part of the body of Christ, doing his work in the world, change your impression of your service in the church?

➡ Have you considered that God has a special work for you to do in his body? Do you believe that God can use you in this way to change your corner of the world?

➡ What would it mean to offer our bodies to God? Does it seem weird to think we "belong to each other" within the body of Christ?

➡ Some say, "I don't need to be part of a church to be a Christ-follower." What would be missing if we all lived that way?

The Romans 12 passage says we all have different gifts but form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. That's a radical statement in our individualistic culture!

➡ How have you contributed to unity in the church? Disunity?

Imagine a world-class athlete racing down an oval track. Every muscle, every thought, and every breath works together for beauty, power, and strength. This is God's vision for the church as we all work together. God wishes that our church would be a strong functioning cooperative body like the body of that runner. When each person decides to participate fully, cooperatively, and eagerly with our gifts, time, and resources, amazing things can happen.

➡ If WCC functioned fully as Christ's body, do you think we could make a significant impact on Washington? How?

SO FAR:

Christian living is equal parts W _____ and

M _____. W _____ should be both

I _____ and C _____.

We are both the P _____ and the T _____.

Only T _____ can we learn to live in U _____.

U _____ is not the same as U _____.

The church is like an O _____ not a B _____.

We all have a P _____ to P _____.