

## United in Christ

Romans 12:3-5

We talked last week about what it means to be fully devoted followers of Christ. In Romans 12:1 Paul appeals to believers to present our bodies as *a living sacrifice*. A sacrifice does not have any rights, it does not make any demands, it does not have any power and it does not seek any glory or credit. A sacrifice is laid on the altar to die and then is burned up.

Is that how you view your life? As a sacrifice, given over to the Lord as a gift offering to bring glory and honor to Him? **Are you a fully devoted follower of Christ or are you trying to be?** We follow Jesus on the way to the cross. Because he served us and gave up His life for us, we serve one another and lay down our lives for the mission Jesus has called us to.

One of the great Gospel truths in Scripture is the doctrine of the believer's **union with Christ**. Salvation is not just that Jesus paid for our sins by dying for us - as wonderful and merciful as that act was. Salvation goes beyond that to say that when you put your faith in Jesus, calling on Him as Lord and pleading with Him to save you, He drew you into Himself!

You were outside of Christ and dead in your sin. But **now you are IN CHRIST** for you have become ONE WITH HIM by faith. Listen to how Paul describes this truth in Romans 6:

*“We were buried therefore **with him** by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been **united with him** in a death like his, we shall certainly be **united with him** in a resurrection like his.”* Romans 6:4-5

Baptism is a visual demonstration of this great doctrine. The believer goes under water to show she has been united with Jesus in his death. But then she comes up from the water to show that she has also been united with Jesus in his resurrection! Listen to Ephesians 2:

*“And you were **dead in the trespasses and sins**... But God... made us alive together **with Christ**—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up **with him** and seated us **with him** in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus**.”* Ephesians 2:1,4-6

Notice the change - you were dead IN SIN, but now you are alive IN CHRIST. This complete transformation was accomplished when God made you alive with Christ, raised you up with Christ and seated you with Christ.

Did you track with that rescue mission of the soccer team in Thailand? **[Use pic]**

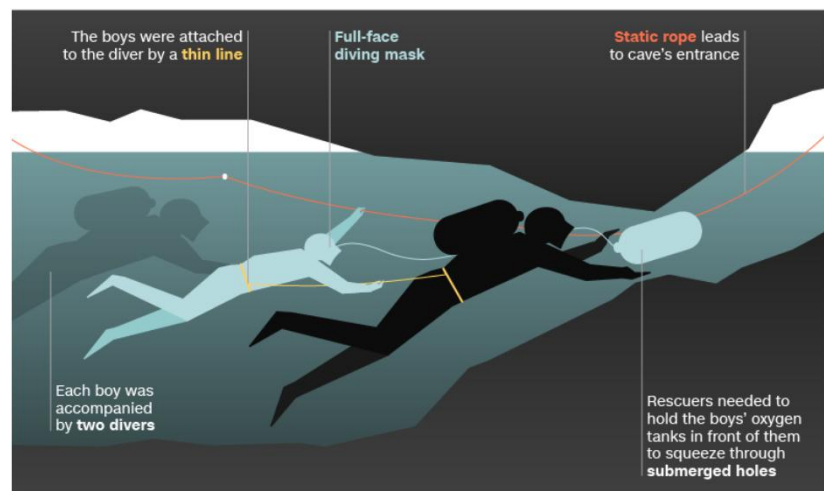


Twelve players and their 25 year old coach left their bikes in the mouth of a cave and ventured into the darkness. Call it courage or foolishness but they ended up 2.5 miles in, and then heavy rains caused the water levels to rise to the point that they couldn't get back out. They were missing for 10 full days before one diver from a team of over 100 divers stumbled on them after moving slowly through a dark and dangerous path.

The boys were unable to swim, **unable to save themselves** and rapidly running out of oxygen. They managed to stay alive by drinking the mineral water dripping down on them from above and by holding onto one another through ten terrifying days of total darkness. All 13 were finally rescued after 18 days in the cave. The one in the worst shape was the coach, Ekapol Chanthawong, who gave all of his snacks to the boys, and taught them meditation techniques he had learned when he had been studying to become a Buddhist monk.

So one of the reasons all 13 survived is that they had a strong and courageous leader. Another reason is that they had each other – literally **holding on to one another in the dark**. And the main reason they all lived is that a rescue mission was mounted to get them out. **[Use pic]**

Each boy was rescued by two divers – one in front, one in back. The lead diver carried oxygen for the soccer player and the tail diver helped guide the boy through the difficult tunnels while he held on to a tether to the lead diver.



What a picture of salvation! Our only hope of being saved is that **a rescue mission was mounted to come get us**. We had wandered into a dark cave and were lost in slavery to sin. But Jesus came all the way to us. And if we tether ourselves to him by faith, he will rescue us from our sin and from this dark and dangerous world, leading us out into the light of eternal life. **Salvation is only possible for those who are united with Christ** – just as the soccer players had to be united with their rescue divers.

In our passage today Paul applies this doctrine of our union with Christ to how we relate to one another in His body:

**All who are United with Jesus by faith are One with each other in His Body**

“For as in **one body** we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually **members one of another.**” Romans 12:4-5

The believer is united to Jesus at the moment of saving faith. ***And at the same instant that you are bound to Jesus you are bound to His body.*** To be one with Jesus is to be one with His people. You cannot have one without the other. So when people say, "I love Jesus but I don't need the church" is like saying, ***"I love my head but I don't need my body."*** How much can you enjoy your head if it is severed from your body? The French tried that a while back - I don't think we want to repeat that experiment.

The basis of our message today is that each of us is a part of the One Body of Christ. Jesus only has one body - made up of believers all over the world and from all of history. Each one of us is a member of that one body since we are one with Christ.

In this section of Romans 12 Paul gives us three assignments to live out our union with one another. The first assignment is in verse 3.

### **As One Part in the One Body of Christ:**

#### **1. Perform a Realistic Self-Assessment**

***"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to **think with sober judgment**, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." Romans 12:3***

It doesn't get much more counter cultural than this verse. Our culture today is all about self-esteem. The goal of education and recreation programs with children is to help them think more highly of themselves. It is all about building up their fragile egos and protecting them from any kind of discouragement or failure. The message of our culture would be: ***"Think of yourself as highly as you possibly can!"*** "You are the best!" "You can be anything that you wanna be!" "The answers are all inside of you!" "Follow your heart and follow your dream!"

The Bible, by contrast, says, "Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think." This in Romans 12:3 after making it very plain in Romans 1, 2 and 3 that all people are wretched sinners - "there is no one righteous, not even one" (3:10). Here, in 12:3, Paul is writing to believers who are forgiven and free from sin, who are righteous in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. But still he says, "Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think."

The point is - perform a realistic self-assessment. Soberly, carefully consider who you are. Reflect on your strengths and your weaknesses. The warning here is not to think you are better or stronger than you actually are. A danger we often run into in this area is over-commitment. Think about this.

**Over-commitment is the sin of pride.**

If you think that you are the best person for every job - that is pride. **Humility recognizes that other people can do many things much better than you can.** So when you find yourself frazzled, with no margin - consider if you have over-assessed your own abilities and under-assessed the abilities of others. Over-commitment is the sin of pride.

When I graduated from college I started right away as the youth pastor at my home church. I was pretty much convinced that I was God's gift to ministry and that the already strong youth program would explode and flourish once I arrived. A volunteer team was already in place, but I pretty much handled everything - the planning, preparation, teaching - even the worship leading. I had one semester of guitar for my fine arts credit at college - so it was all me leading the singing on top of everything else.

Can you guess how those first six months went? The youth group started out with 25-30 students. By February when we took a group on a retreat we had 6. Soon after that a friend came back into town and asked if he could take over the worship leading. I was grateful to let that one go - and everyone else was even more glad to have someone else leading the music.

That was the first of many times over the last twenty years that God has gently but firmly reminded me that **it is not about me.** When I try to do too much or start to think that everything depends on my clever plans or my winsome personality or my impressive teaching, things tend to start going poorly. So my goal now is to keep myself out of the way and to pray and plan and work with the understanding that the results belong to the Lord and I am just one part in the local body. I need each one of you as much as anyone at Oakwood needs me.

Over-commitment is the sin of pride.

**Rest is an act of faith.**

***God Himself modeled for us the importance of REST.*** He created the world in six days and then stopped so He could rest on the seventh. Did God need a break? Of course not. His power is limitless. But He was teaching us what we as created beings need to learn: that we can and must REST. One application of this is that we need to let other people work - to let them do their part so that we can all do our best at doing our own part.

Consider what happens when you close your eyes every night. Does the earth stop spinning? Does gravity stop pulling? Does water stop adhering to itself? Does the sun stop burning? Do plants stop turning CO<sub>2</sub> into Oxygen? Do fish stop swimming? When you stop thinking and working does the world grind to a halt?

No. The humbling reality for all of us is that **the world keeps going**, relentlessly, regardless of what we do. Therefore: rest is an act of faith. Close your eyes and sleep peacefully at night knowing that God never stops working and you can trust Him to handle things.

My wife is an amazing worker bee. She just single handedly packed up all of our possessions for the 13th time in our 19 years of marriage! We had a great crew to load the trucks and help us move in. But Kristin did the lion's share of the packing and organizing. This is her way and her personality - she is an amazingly hard worker, detail oriented and efficient.

But I often have to remind her:

**You are the only one who can NOT do the tasks you've been doing.**

Think about that. If I'm in the office, I cannot NOT do the dishes on her behalf. If she does them, I cannot undo that work. Only she can NOT do a task so that I can do it later or recruit one of my able bodied young men to get it done. Do you see the point?

Let's say you've been taking care of ten things here at Oakwood. You are the only one in the position to NOT do those tasks. If you continue to do them it means that no one else will be able to do them. The one doing the work is the only one who can NOT do it and thereby leave it for someone else.

Now, I know we have a wonderful team of people who prepare communion - as it should be. But let's say we had one person who came in early every month and single-handedly prepared every cup of juice and broke every piece of bread. In that case, that person would be the only one who could NOT do that job and make that service available to other people.

This may sound like the opposite of the point of this Serve the Church series - and some of you should not be paying attention because you need to find stuff to do and get to work. But some of you really need to hear this. Over-commitment is the sin of pride. Rest is an act of faith. So is delegation and team-building. You are the only one who can NOT do the task you have been doing. Back to the words of Paul in Romans 12:3 -

**As One Part in the One Body of Christ:**

1. Perform a **Realistic** Self-Assessment

***"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think*, but to think with sober judgment, each *according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*" Romans 12:3***

Perform a realistic self-assessment. Recognize that you have weaknesses and where you are weak someone else is strong. Accept the joyful freedom of saying "no" to certain duties so that someone else can say a joyful "yes" to a job better suited to them.

One more observation from this verse: let's be sure we measure the right thing. Our culture measures and treasures ABILITY. The more talent and intelligence and strength you have the more you will be affirmed by the people in this world. Grades. Test scores. State championships. Scholarships. We measure ability and reward it accordingly.

But notice what Paul exhorts us to measure in this verse: "according to the measure of FAITH that God has assigned."

### **We should measure Faith not Ability.**

We love to measure our ability and compare ourselves to other people. I'm taller than that guy. I'm smarter than that girl. I'm faster than he is. I'm better at math than she is. I can school him in basketball. I can hit those notes and she can't. I could play that riff much better than he did. I could have written that paragraph much better than she did. This is how we tend to build up our self-esteem, by focusing on our strengths relative to other people.

But God wants us to measure and treasure FAITH not ability. Faith is how much we depend on God. Ability is often how much we depend on ourselves. And notice that even faith is something that God has assigned to each of us in a certain measure. So if you have a lot of faith - if you find it easy to trust in God completely - remember that even that faith is a gift from God to you. He has assigned you that measure of faith. Praise and thank Him for that gift!

The first assignment is to perform a realistic self-assessment. Second, discern your unique role in the body.

### **As One Part in the One Body of Christ:**

#### **2. Discern your unique Role in the Body**

***"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function." Romans 12:4***

The human body has somewhere around 7500 distinctly named parts, according to the American Association of Anatomists (whoever they are). 206 bones, over 600 muscles and 78 major organs, plus all the connective tissue, skin covering and everything else that happens at the microscopic level. Some quick research reveals that a single human cell is tremendously complex, containing somewhere around 100 trillion atoms. Of course, this is difficult to measure because your cells are constantly growing and multiplying. An article I read this week said there is more electrical wiring in ONE human brain than in all the computer systems of the world put together! (<https://creation.com/the-human-body-gods-masterpiece>)

Another article documents how a baby with fully functional lungs can live immersed in WATER for months and months and then, in a few seconds, suddenly draw his first breath and start

breathing air. A baby in the womb lives in a system of flowing blood and oxygen that bypasses the lungs. But when that baby is born, he suddenly needs those lungs to inflate and start working - and by the miracle of God's incredible design in creation, they do! The human body is truly God's masterpiece! We are "fearfully and wonderfully made!" <http://www.icr.org/article/5044>

Check out this video on the amount of DNA in your body:[https://youtu.be/cM51\\_6lipq0](https://youtu.be/cM51_6lipq0)  
**[Please download that video to play on Sunday! *The Astounding amount of DNA in the human body*, by Business Insider]**

In **1 Corinthians 12** Paul applies this principle of the body to believers in the local church referring to a few specific body parts: the foot, the hand, the eye, the ear, the nose and the head. Every body needs feet to get around, hands to do things, eyes to see, ears to hear and Paul doesn't mention it but a mouth to speak is also rather useful. Of course, people adapt to make do when one or more of these major systems is not working, but in a healthy human body all the parts do their job and every part depends completely on the others.

**"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" 1 Corinthians 12:21**

It's the same in the church. The elders can't say to the deacons, "We have no need of you," Nor can the deacons say to the TreeHouse team, "We have no need of you," nor can TreeHouse tell the worship team, "We don't need you," and so on. We all need each other! This is much more than "just do your chores" if you have a chore chart in your house. We could run the church that way with a big table on the wall in back and keep it fair and balanced for who takes out the trash this week and who opens the doors and who turns off the AC units, etc.

But we don't want the church to operate with a chore chart, or like a factory assembly line, we want it to operate like a BODY.

### **As One Part in the One Body of Christ:**

#### **2. Discern your unique Role in the Body**

**"For as in one body we have many members, and *the members do not all have the same function.*" Romans 12:4**

The church body has many members and the members do not all have the same function. Each of us has a unique role to play. What is the role God has assigned to you? Have you discovered the blessing of serving in line with your spiritual gifts?

Every Christian believer has at least one gift from the Holy Spirit that enables you to build up the church.

## **Spiritual Gifts**

- Every believer has at least one spiritual gift
- No believer has all of the gifts
- The purpose of the gifts is to build up the church

A spiritual gift is not to build up your self-esteem and make you feel all impressive. The gifts were given to build up the CHURCH. Don't forget what Paul just said – "Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think"!

But the point here is that you DO have a supernatural enablement from the Holy Spirit to do something to build up the local church. You are an important part of the body and it is essential to the healthy function of our church that you discover your role and begin operating in it.

The best way to find out your gift is to ***try different ministries***. When you start using your spiritual gift you will know pretty much right away because it will feel so natural. One of the main reasons we felt called to Oakwood was that one of my primary spiritual gifts is preaching and teaching. I love to study God's Word and, as you can see, I don't mind standing up front and talking about it.

For the three years before we came here I was an Outreach Pastor for a large church. I loved the outreach and the Lord did some very cool things while we were there. But for the most part my teaching gift was not being used. So I felt like something was missing. And when I got here and started preaching again, it was like something woke up again.

Some of you may feel that way if you used to be serving in some way but have stepped out for some reason. You may feel like you're on the shelf and not being used. You were a small group leader, regularly involved in shepherding people. You were a Sunday School teacher for kids, creatively engaging the next generation with Biblical truth. You were an usher or greeter, interacting with people and welcoming them to worship. You were a deacon, working away on various projects around the church.

Whatever your gift is, you'll know when you start using it. It will be like a natural ability you have – with piano or crafting or sports – but even more compelling. You'll sense a special joy in using it. You'll see a special fruitfulness when you serve with your gift. And other people will notice it too and affirm that gift in you. Try something! Get involved! Discern your unique role in the body – we need you!

Finally, let's be sure to support one another.

## **As One Part in the One Body of Christ:**

1. Perform a Realistic Self-Assessment



2. Discern your Unique Role in the Body

3. **Support the other members of the Body**

“So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually *members one of another.*”

Romans 12:5

We are one in Christ. United with Him we are united with one another. To be in Christ is to be a part of His Body. We belong to one another. When one part hurts, we all hurt. When one part rejoices, we all celebrate. We are bound together. We are one.

So part of our calling is to encourage and support the other members in the body. ***Help the people around you to figure out their gifts*** and encourage them to start using them.

3. **Support the other members of the Body**

“So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually *members one of another.*”

Romans 12:5

- Help others ***Discover*** their gifts
- ***Encourage*** others as they use their gifts

When you see someone really making a difference with their gift, let them know it! There is your homework for today: notice someone who is really serving Oakwood with their spiritual gift and let them know how much you appreciate them.

You might just tell them before you leave today. Or you might send an email or – take a breath – ***write a hand-written note.*** For that you’ll need to dig up this old implement called a pen and visit that section of the store where they sell cards. Encourage someone this week! Support the other members of the body as each part does its work.

And let’s also be sure to apply the command just a few verses later:

**Live out the truth of our Interdependence**

***“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”*** Romans 12:15

When a couple has a baby – celebrate with them! When someone gets a new house – help them move in and rejoice in how God has blessed. When someone gets a new job or a promotion – praise the Lord with them.

But when a loved one dies, take the time to mourn with the one who lost someone precious to them. When the lab calls with that scary diagnosis, take the time to pray with the sick person. When someone is just hurting for whatever reason – the whole body should hurt with them. We are one in Christ. We are members of one another. ***We are all interconnected in Christ.***

He came to rescue us. Since we are bound to Him by faith we are one with each other. Let's be the Body of Jesus – let's be His hands and feet and eyes and ears and voice to each other and to a world lost in darkness.

Let's pray.