

Lesson 1: Introduction to “Being the Body of Christ”

How do people define themselves? Asked another way, what is it that people use to form their identity?

- Job
- Possessions
- Relationships
- Faith

Paul and the early Christians firmly believed that our identity was wrapped up in our faith in Jesus Christ. They believed that our faith not only brought us into relationship with God, through Christ, but that it also brought us into a spiritual community and unified identity with other Christians.

A Spiritual House

We find several different illustrations to help us understand both our connection with God and our connection with other Christians. In 1 Peter 2, Peter uses the image of a spiritual house where Christ is the cornerstone and all of us are like bricks that make up the rest of the house. If you imagine that you see both our connection with one another and the centrality of Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. The cornerstone is the stone that is laid that the rest of the walls are built up and built square. This stone is the foundation and guide for the rest of the bricks.

In that metaphor, what does it say about the importance we have to each other as each brick rests on all the others?

What does it say about our dependence on Christ?

What would happen to the house if you pulled out bricks or took away the cornerstone?

The body of Christ

In our lessons over the next two months we are going to be talking about how we, as Christians, are members of the body of Christ with Christ as our head.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

As we listen in on what Paul wrote it reminds us that we are part of something special, deep, eternal and meaningful. We are united with Christ, the savior of the world. He has welcomed us in along with our brothers and sisters in Christ to be a part of His body.

We started this lesson talking about identity and how people are confused over it. After hearing what Paul wrote in these verses, *how does knowing that help you understand who you are....your identity?*

Exercise 1:

Look around the room and consider the importance of every single person who is present. Realize how who they are and what they do is more connected to you than we often think.

Take a moment and go around the room and say something encouraging to each person present. Make sure everyone gets covered. ***[Leaders: do what you can to try to even things out so that you don't spend 5 minutes on one person and 10 seconds on another]***

How did it make you feel for other people to offer up encouraging words to you?

How did it make you feel to say words of encouragement to someone else?

Exercise 2:

Remember, the body is about other Christians but it is also about the head, Jesus Christ. Take a few minutes and tell the group what you think about him....offer him words of praise. Say what you appreciate about your Lord.

Why is it important to say things like that to Jesus or about Jesus?

How would talking to each other and to Christ in these ways change the way we see and treat each other?

How might it impact that way we see people in general?

The truth is, many people struggle to find love and acceptance...support in their pain and someone to lean on when they are weak. Care groups are done in light of the fact that we are the body of Christ and who we are and what happens in our lives both the pain and the joy should impact everyone else so we can all work together under our head, Jesus Christ.

Application

How does your identity being grounded in Christ change the way you make decisions?

How might we incorporate doing that more often in our daily lives?

How might our Care groups incorporate this sort of encouragement on a more regular basis?

Prayer

Ask for prayer needs and pray for those needs as you wrap up the lesson.

Lesson 2: Connection

Icebreaker: *When you hear the phrase “unity in diversity” what do you think of?*

Read 1 Cor 12:12-14

When you think about the human body it is all the same body but it has many different parts that all have different functions. Take that idea of the body and its unity and diversity and apply it to the church.

How does the church have diversity?

Even among all the differences we have how do we still find unity?

This lesson is going to be on the unity that we have as the body of Christ. Next week we will focus in on the diversity of functions and abilities.

After Paul says the body has many parts but it is all still the same body he wrote, “so it is with Christ” *What do you think he meant by that?*

Look at the very next verse – 12:13. Paul uses the word “one” three different times. *What are the three “ones” in verse 13?*

- Baptized by **one Spirit**
- Into **one body**
- Given **one Spirit** to drink

Although we are all individuals who are all making decisions and all living our lives we have a deep and profound connection that comes through the Holy Spirit and through our baptism. God is the one who puts us into the “one body” of Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:3-5

Name the seven “ones” in verses 4-5.

- Body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God

God has done a lot to bring us unity. He has saved us the same way. His one and only Son died for each and every one of us. He gives us the same Spirit and brings us into the same body of Christ, which is the people of God.

What sorts of things break unity in the body of Christ or cause splits among God’s people?

In both list Paul mentions the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one of the key unifiers of the body of Christ. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:13 that it is the Holy Spirit that marks every Christian as a seal

of the promise. In other words, when you become a Christian you receive the Holy Spirit. Every single Christian has the same Spirit. That gives us all a common bond.

If we recognized that all believers had the same Holy Spirit, would it change the way we treat other Christians?

What might we be quicker to do toward others and slower to do?

- Quicker to love and encourage
- Slower to attack and discourage

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

Christ gave certain gifts to certain people in order that what might happen (4:12)?

- Equip Christians for works of service that result in the body of Christ being built up

What does it mean for the body of Christ to be built up?

- For the faith of the church to be strengthened
- For us to be better connected
- For us to mature

When we use the gifts God gave us to promote the health of the church body, the body grows stronger and is less likely to be tossed around by the world.

What role does Christ play in connecting the body? (4:15-16)

What do you think “every supporting ligament” means?

- Christ binds us together
- Also, as parts of Christ’s body we can be an eye, ear, foot, hand...or even a “supporting ligament”. We can do this by being a “connector”. Someone who goes out of their way to make others feel a part of things.

The church needs more connectors. The body isn’t always as unified as it needs to be. Those who have been around a long time feel right at home. Often, though, new people struggle to connect.

Application

How can we help new people connect to the congregation through small groups?

How can we help them connect outside of small groups?

What can you do this week to help someone feel more a part of the congregation and the body of Christ?

Prayer time

Lesson 3: Function and Gifts

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul states the obvious...not all of our body parts do the same thing. Feet and hands and eyes and ears all look different and act different but they all work together to make the body what it is and help the body function effectively.

Read 1 Cor 12:14-20

What does all this foot talking to the hand and ear talking to the eye talk about?

- Paul is saying that it is easy for us to get jealous of how God uses other people
- We cannot get hung up on who has which gifts but to be the part of the body of Christ we are to the best of our ability.

Why do we get jealous of the gifts of others?

How can Satan use that to hurt Christians and/or the church?

The thing that helps us put aside our jealousy is this. We know that God has put every single part exactly where it needs to be and gifted each of us exactly how we need to be gifted to do the most good.

Read again 1 Corinthians 12:18-20 & Ephesians 4:11-13

It was Christ who gave the gifts. Since Christ is the one who decides which gifts to give which people, who are we to be jealous of others? We have each been specially gifted by Christ to do the things he wants for us to do.

Here is how Paul put it two chapters earlier in Ephesians 2:10,

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

What do you think that verse means?

Think about the fact that the God of the universe made you and made you with specific gifts.

Now think about the fact that he also put opportunity in this world...good things he designed for you to do with the gifts He gave you. That is an amazing thing!

What does that say about the way God sees you?

What should that do to us in the way we see God?

What sort of opportunities have you seen God send your way?

How might we be more on the lookout for how our gifts match the opportunities God sends us?

We should be on the lookout for opportunity!

We also need to be aware that the church cannot function without a variety of people with a variety of gifts. Church leadership is not a personality contest. It is about people submitting themselves to the Lordship of Christ and being used as servants wherever God sees fit.

Imagine a church or Care group, firing on all cylinders where each person is using the gifts God has given them to the benefit of the church, non-Christians and to the glory of God. That would be an amazing thing. A church like that couldn't help but grow.

What prevents you from using your gifts?

How might you find avenues to use the gifts God has given you?

How might care group be another opportunity to allow God to use you for His glory?

Application

What sorts of talents do you have that you believe God has gifted you with?

How might those talents be used to serve others?

What could you as a Care group do to openly rely more on each other?

Prayer time

Lesson 4: Christ as the Head

One of the things we keep noticing in these verses is that the body doesn't direct itself. The body is directed by its head.

Read Ephesians 1:21-12 & 4:15

Christ is the supreme authority. *What does Paul say God placed under Christ's feet?*

- All things – which points back to the all rule, authority, power and dominion from 1:22.

The church is under the headship of Christ. That means Christ is in charge of his church. He calls the shots. He runs the show. He puts things where he wants them and gifts us how he, in all his wisdom and authority, sees fit.

It is tempting to think that the church is run by people. The church does have leadership but everyone in the church is under the authority and headship of Christ. That means we are all seeking to please our Lord and follow His lead.

Now, think about this in terms of Jesus as the head of the body (the church).

How does the church body follow the lead of Christ as our head?

- We study his teaching
- We have the Holy Spirit
- We follow Him
- Where he goes, we go...he leads the way.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

What image does the Hebrew writer give us here?

- That this life is like a race

What advice does he give for us to follow?

- Throw off what hinders us
- Get rid of sin that entangles us
- Run the race that is before us

What sort of things slow us down or hinder us in the race of life?

How do you really throw those things off?

How do we know where to run?

- He says when you are running, make sure you fix your eyes on Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Think about Jesus as a pioneer for a moment.

How was Jesus a lot like a pioneer for our lives?

- A pioneer goes first. They blaze the trail and show others who come after them the safe way through dangerous places.
- Jesus does that for us! He went first. He showed us how to live and then calls us to come and follow him.

If we follow Jesus, this faith pioneer, where will we end up?

- The same place he did – with God for eternity.

Last in Hebrews, the writer tells us part of Jesus being a pioneer involved his suffering. The writer tells us to consider that suffering and the glory that followed so that we, although we suffer as well, won't lose heart.

Should suffering be expected in our lives? What do we do with suffering?

What did we learn from Christ about suffering and how do we use that in our lives?

Read Colossians 1:15-18

Here we see that everything that is, ultimately came from Christ. Again, that means Christ calls the shots and we follow under his Lordship.

Jesus is not just the head of the church but is head of every single Christian. That means that he has ultimate authority in our lives as we follow him.

Application

If you thought about your life with Christ calling the shots instead of you, what would change?

What sorts of things would you have to give up?

What sorts of things might fill in the empty spots from the things you gave up?

Prayer time

Lesson 5: Identifying & Using Your Talents

Over the last few weeks we have looked at what it means to be the body of Christ. We have talked about how we are members of Christ's body and how Christ is the head. We have discussed the fact that God has gifted us in various ways in order to help the body grow. This all leads us to the next topic – How do you get better connected to the body to where you can use your gifts in the way God intends?

Spiritual atrophy

When I was younger I (Matt) broke my arm. I was in a cast 6 weeks and when I got out I was amazed at how much smaller my arm had gotten. This is called atrophy from lack of use.

Is there any parallel there between physical atrophy and spiritual atrophy? Explain.

Serving in the seemingly small ways

We may not all have the same abilities and talents but we can all be used in some way. God doesn't just need the seeming "big" stuff done...but the "little" stuff too.

What are some simple ways we can serve God that aren't at all flashy but still very important?

Why do we think some acts of service are small and others are big?

When it comes to kingdom work there is no small job. Everything and everyone is important. Some things are more public than others but that doesn't mean there is a hierarchy to how important each person and each talent is to the church body.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10

What reason does Paul give for the reasons God created us the way He did in 2:10?

Think about the fact that God made you fully knowing some of the things He had in mind for you to do. *What do you think about that fact?*

If there are things God wants for us to do, it is safe to say that it is important for us to identify those opportunities as they arise and that we get to work doing what God has placed in front of us.

The gift of time and the distraction of busyness:

When we talk about God giving us each gifts, we are typically talking about the talents and characteristics we each have that gear us toward having the ability to do some things exceptionally. But there is more to it than that. One of our greatest gifts is **time**.

How is time a gift?

How much of our time and attention does God get?

We live in a very busy world. There are hundreds of things you can commit yourself to. It is important to remember that when we say “yes” to something that we are saying “no” to everything else in that time slot. That isn’t all bad...it can be a very good thing. But that point reminds us that how we choose to use our time impacts many other things.

Identifying our gifts

How do you identify the gifts God has given you?

We use our gifts every single day. Sometimes we use our gifts for the good and other times for the bad. For example, let’s say someone had the gift of connecting with people. *How might that be used for the good and how might it be used for the bad?*

It is important that we use the gifts God has given us in ways that honor and glorify God.

The important question for us, then is this, *How might you use the gifts (time, talents, etc) God has blessed you with to glorify God?*

Another question that is important to consider is, *How might we use our gifts to connect with other people (both Christian and non-Christian)?*

Last, what happens when we actively use our time and talents for God?

- We can grow spiritually
- The church can thrive and grow
- God is glorified.

What keeps us from investing more of ourselves into spiritual things?

What is an opportunity you know of right now that you might be able to help with?

What do you do when you are burned out and don’t even want to think about doing one more thing? How can we help each other with that?

Exercise: Take a moment for people in the group to say what they think other members of the group are talented at. Let this be a time of affirmation and encouragement.

Pray that God will use us for His glory!

Lesson 6: The Body in Motion (Holiness)

As we noted last week bodies are made to move. To stop moving your body results in atrophy and weakness. So the next question is, what is the church body designed and purposed by God to do? Scripture lays out several things that God expects His people to be active in doing.

What would you say are the purposes of the church?

Over the next 5 weeks we will be discussing the main purposes of the church. There are many purposes that could be selected from scripture. We are going to highlight: our call to holiness, glorifying God, Christian community, reaching the lost and serving others.

Purpose #1 Our call to holiness

What does "holy" mean?

- Set apart (from the world)

When the world thinks about Christians and being holy, what is the stereotype?

Holiness is not about our own ability to achieve perfection. When we think it is about us being so good and holy by ourselves we get into a mess and give Christianity a bad name. Holiness is more about the work of God in us. In his book, "The God of the Towel," Jim McGuigan says the following about the life of holiness that God offers us,

"The holiness of God doesn't seek the destruction of the sinner, but the destruction of sin and the restoration of life for the sinner. Holy is what God is, and the life he offers in relationship with himself must have that character. It cannot be otherwise-there's nothing arbitrary about it. The life he offers is life that is lived in that spirit-a spirit of holiness." – God of the Towel, 86.

What do you think about the distinction between the sinner and the sin?

Read 1 Peter 1:16

That is a very hard teaching that cannot be fully understood by itself...back up a bit and read it in context to get a better understanding of what Peter is talking about here – **1 Peter 1:13-16**

Peter is calling us to live holy lives but what do we have to hope on in order to be holy as God desires?

Holiness requires grace because as Paul wrote in **Romans 3:10 & 3:23** that none of us are righteous on our own. So our holiness does not come from ourselves but from God. Another place we have seen this is in **1 Cor 6:19 & Ephesians 2:19-22** where Paul tells the Corinthians

and the Ephesians that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. He says the reason we have the Spirit in us is only because we have received it from God. In other words, God gives us the Spirit by his own grace and mercy, not because we earned it.

Why do you think some Christians act like they are “holier than thou”?

What changes once you realize that the holiness we have is a gift from God, not of ourselves?

There is a tension here because we called to live holy lives but we also realize that we will never achieve holiness on our own. At the end of the day, holiness is a gift from God and yet we are still called to try our best to live holy lives.

Why should we try to live holy lives if we know we will never achieve it on our own?

- It shows we take God seriously
- It shows we have a heart that really wants to try to do the right thing.
- Living obediently is the right response to the God who sent His Son to die for our sins...in other words, if you know someone died to make you holy...you would try to live up to it, even though you won't do it perfectly.

How do we live as holy people in the world, without coming across as self-righteous hypocrites?

Application

How might God making us holy be motivation for us to have a greater appreciation for God's grace and mercy?

How do we live holy lives in a world that is not interested in holiness?

What challenges does that bring to the Christian life?

How might we, as a church or small group, help each other through these challenges?

Praying & Sharing time

Lesson 7: The Body in Motion (Reach the Lost)

There is a quote that was floating around a few years ago by famous magician and atheist Penn Jillette where he was criticizing other atheists for saying Christians shouldn't share their faith (did you catch that?)...here is what he said,

"I don't respect people who don't proselytize. If you believe that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and people could be going to Hell ... and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward ... how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? "How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it, ... there's a certain point where I tackle you, and [everlasting life] is *more* important than that."

What do you think about what he had to say?

Why should there be some sense of urgency when it comes to outreach and why do you think so many of us are still so hesitant to start that conversation with someone?

One of the purposes of the church is to reach out to those who haven't chosen to follow Jesus Christ. Let's look at a few verses that talk about our mission as Christians.

Read Matthew 28:18-20

What two things does Jesus tell them to do?

- Go
- Make disciples

Go:

If you dig around a little on the word "go" it isn't a command...instead it is more of a description. Jesus is more saying "as you go into the world" more than he is commanding that all Christians must leave where they are in order to reach people.

Once you see what Jesus said like that, it is much easier to see that outreach doesn't have to require going somewhere far away, being a professional minister or learning a new language. Instead, it opens up all Christians, everywhere, to be reaching out to those around them wherever they go...even if it is just the person next door. In saying "go" Jesus is saying that we cannot expect the world to come to us or that all the new people we reach will be because they decided to visit our worship gathering. We must go to them in order to reach them.

What did Jesus say was their mission?

- To make disciples

How does Jesus say one goes about making a disciple?

- Baptizing them
- Teaching them to obey all Christ taught

Often our teaching of seekers starts with Paul's letters. But Jesus says that what is first and foremost is that we get people to Jesus. We can get people to Jesus through what Paul had to say but this reminds us that we cannot neglect the centrality of the four Gospels in teaching people about Jesus. That means we need to know what sorts of things Jesus taught and be in tune with how we might teach those things to someone who is seeking the Lord.

Exercise: Name some things Jesus said or subjects he taught on that are very important for someone seeking Jesus, or even a long time Christian to understand.

Application:

What do you think most prevents us from talking to people about Jesus?

How might we get over that?

Exercise: Think of someone you know who doesn't know Jesus. When it is time to pray, let us make sure to lift up those who don't know the Lord...that we might be used to reach out to them and help them become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Why do you think many of us don't often pray for people who aren't Christians?

Prayer time – make sure to pray for outreach

Lesson 8: Serving & Being Served

One of our roles in the world as Christians is to serve other people. There are a lot of verses that talk about this and most of these verses are about Christians serving other Christians.

Serving inside the church

Read Galatians 6:8-10

Who does Paul say Christians should do good to?

Why does Paul say that we should take even more interest in helping or doing good to other Christians?

- We are in this faith thing together. We are unified by the Holy Spirit.
- We have an obligation toward each other as the body of Christ that we don't have toward the world.

Read Galatians 5:13-15

Again, these verses are about serving and loving other Christians. *How does Paul say we are to serve or with what attitude are we to serve other Christians?*

How is it possible to serve someone not in love?

The turn...from us serving others to others serving us - Read Galatians 6:2

This is the command to bear the burdens of other Christians...we should do that. There are also times we have burdens that we need someone else to carry. Notice that bearing burdens is "reciprocal" – it goes back and forth. This is not someone always doing it for someone else...this is each of us continually doing this for each other. When it works that way, no one gets worn out.

We talk so much about how we can serve others...but what about the times we get served?

When are times you really could use someone to help you out with something?

Read Matthew 20:26-28

The example of Jesus is that he didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life for us and yet Jesus was still human with real needs and had real people who supported him along the way.

Is there a difference between receiving support and requiring support? In other words, we shouldn't expect everyone to carry us along all the time and yet there are times when we all need help.

It isn't that our need for help can be too large...it is more than our attitude can become ungodly – that we start seeing others as existing to meet our needs and to serve us.

When was a time you really needed some help and how did you get it?

What does it feel like to get help from someone else?

Why do we resist it?

Serving Outside the Church

Going back to Galatians 6:10 – Paul said that we are to do good to all and that includes non-Christians.

What are some ways we can serve our community?

We don't have to create a new ministry or program for every need we see. Most of the service that happens will be individual people deciding to do a good deed for someone else.

A big opportunity - Feeding Children Everywhere

Every once in a while we get some very public ways to serve. This Saturday is one of those opportunities with Feeding Children Everywhere. We will be packing 60,000 meals from 9am-noon this Saturday in the Activity Center. The food is going to go to an area food bank to feed hungry children.

This morning we gave of our money to help this cause. This Saturday we will be giving of our time. We would love for everyone to come out and pack some of these meals. It is also a great time to invite someone you have been wanting to invite to church to come and serve alongside it – it will be a very exciting experience and a great way to get to know your friends!

Prayer time – Pray that God will open our eyes to the needs around us. Pray also that God will open up our own hearts in the times we need help to be able to receive it. Last, pray for success and blessing on the Feeding Children Everywhere event this Saturday...that God would use it to feed kids and also to reach new people.

Lesson 9: Glorifying God

What is the most important thing that you can do with your life? Is it having a great job? Making a lot of money? Attend church? What is the most important thing you can do with your life?

If God is the greatest being that can possibly be conceived of...that there is nothing and no one greater than Him...then there is no one and nothing better to give our entire lives and allegiance to than him.

In short, we exist to give glory to God.

How would you define "glory"?

In both the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament the word usually means radiance or splendor...that someone or something is of great importance and power so that it radiates with majesty. To give someone glory, then, is to recognize their greatness...to give honor. We often think of this as worship.

Why is God worthy of us giving Him glory and honor?

How do we actually give glory and honor to God?

It is more than just coming to church to sing worship songs and take the Lord's Supper...there is far more to it than that.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-32

Paul just got done teaching them about what they should and shouldn't eat in regard to meat sacrificed to an idol. His conclusion is that at the end of the day that our decision is based upon honoring God with our decisions and actions.

Glorifying God is not just about Sunday...everything we say and do, even the attitude we have is about giving God glory...or not.

How might we determine whether or not a particular decision brings glory to God?

How is causing someone to stumble a mark that we haven't done something in a way that glorifies God?

Knowing God

In order to give God glory, we must realize that God is worthy of our praise. You don't give glory to someone or something that you don't have reverence for.

Read Psalm 34 and ask *Why is God worthy of our praise based on these verses?*

What other reasons can you think of that show how worthy God is of us giving Him glory?

Now, from your own experience with God, what makes Him worthy of receiving glory?

- You might share something God has personally brought you through that reminds you of his presence and power...that is isn't just in the pages of scripture long ago but in real lives today to

Desiring God

There are things in life that we know are true but until we desire them nothing changes.

Applying that to God means that we can know all sorts of things about God that make Him worthy of our praise and still not praise Him...that God is awesome and powerful and still have no desire to worship Him or give him glory and honor.

How can we grow our desire for God?

How can we help each other live lives that are God honoring?

Application

Why should we desire God?

What keeps us from doing that?

What are some areas of your life that you struggle to honor and glorify God with (think back to 1 Cor 10:31-32)

Prayer time – pray God would increase our desire for Him and that we would take things out of our lives that get in the way of doing that.

Lesson 10: Spiritual Formation

Every single one of us is undergoing some form of spiritual formation every single day...either for the good or for the “not so good.” No one is spiritually static.

God’s desire for His children is that we become more and more conformed into the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ.

Read Romans 8:28-29

What does it mean to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ?

We talk about WWJD (what would Jesus do) but there is something deeper than just doing what Jesus did and that is actually becoming more like Jesus.

What is the difference in doing things like Jesus and actually becoming more like Jesus?

- The first can be shallow imitation
- The second is meaningful and deep inner transformation

How do we actually become more like Jesus in our everyday lives?

- Part of it is our desire to do that...it is hard to become something or someone you don’t want to be
- The biggest part, though, is how God is working in our lives. He is the one who is doing the transforming work in our lives. It is His power at work, not our own.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 (emphasis will be on verse 18)

The word “contemplate” in “contemplate the Lord’s glory” can mean “reflect the Lord’s glory.” Here, Paul is saying that we are undergoing a change...not the changing of our voices in puberty or the changing of our bodies due to age. We are undergoing a real, spiritual change in becoming more and more like Jesus.

What does it mean to reflect the Lord’s glory?

When people see us, they should be able to pick up on hints of Jesus because we are living lives that honor our Lord (think back to last week’s lesson on glory and glorifying God).

When was a time someone saw Jesus in something you did?

What is it about someone that reminds you of Jesus when you see Him in someone else?

Read Colossians 3:9-14

Here we are told that we have put on a new self through Christ. We are no longer who we used to be. Something has changed...in fact, everything has changed. That means that this inward change has an impact on our outward actions.

What does Paul say we should and shouldn't do as a result of the inner change that God is working inside us as Christians?

Why does it matter what you do with your body/with your actions?

- If Christ really is forming and transforming you...then it matters what you do. What you do reflects something in the inner attitude of the heart...the motivation that drives the things we do. If Christ is working in us we will better be able to put aside fleshly things.

The things we do shape what is on the inside. Said another way, our actions shape our heart. The reverse of that is that our heart produce various actions. The Bible frequently talks about the fact that the kind of fruit a tree produces is directly in line with what kind of tree it is. That is not meant to be a categorizing statement.

How is the fruit your life is producing directly related to what is going on inside your heart and mind?

Last, read Jeremiah 18:1-10 & 2 Cor 4:7-10

How are we like clay in the hands of God?

What do you think God is shaping you to be?

What blemishes and imperfections seem to keep cropping up in your clay?

Application

How is God working to spiritual form you right now?

What kinds of spiritual disciplines might help to shape your heart to be more like Jesus?

How do things like study, prayer and acts of selfless kindness form Jesus in us?

Prayer time – pray that God will shape us into who He wants us to be and that we will yield to the formation process

Lesson 11: Love and Unity

The church in Corinth had some major problems. The Lord's Supper had turned from sacred meal to drunken festival and free-for-all. The rich seem to have been going first at the meal, leaving the poor to get the leftover scraps at the table. They had immorality in their midst that even pagan's wouldn't be proud of. They had even abused the spiritual gifts God had given them. Those who prophesied and spoke in tongues by the Holy Spirit were using their gifts to prove who was superior.

In the middle of correcting all these abuses in worship, Paul pauses for a moment to put things into perspective. Paul starts with the list of Holy Spirit gifts and shows the Corinthian Christians that what really matters is not who has the best spiritual gift but who is it that is truly loving of others.

Let's listen in on what Paul had to say,

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (read it through again)

What sorts of things were the Corinthians putting as more important than having a loving attitude?

Why is it that people can make a competition out of just about anything?

What is the result of always trying to be on top?

Read 13:4-7 (read it through again)

This is not originally meant to be read at weddings...this is Paul's teaching that love is the answer to disunity and the destructive nature of pride.

What are some things Paul says about love?

How is that different than the things he said about their spiritual gifts in 13:1-3?

Read 13:8-13 (read it through again)

What makes love the most important thing we can do and attitude we can have?

Why would it be tempting to think that speaking in tongues or having a divine word of prophesy from the Lord might make someone feel more important than they really are?

Where did the power for those kind of gifts come from?

- The gifts were given by God and were not of any special character trait of the person who received the gift
- They received the spiritual gift from God and then seemed to have bragged about it.

What does it say about someone to get a free gift from God and then use that to beat someone else up or brag about it?

In 13:11 Paul does some teaching on maturity and immaturity. He reminds them of how mature people think and act. But we don't stay children physically and Paul doesn't expect the Corinthians to stay children spiritually either. He expects them to "Grow up" and not act like kids.

Last, Paul says a time is coming when all of these things that we only partially know and see will come to fulfillment and then we will know fully. All the mysteries will be revealed and all the things we didn't have eyes to see will be seen.

What does Paul say, at that time, will remain?

What is it that makes love the greatest of the three?

Application

Think about anyone you might be at odds with, how might really loving them help make that situation easier?

How does being unloving lead to disunity?

What sorts of things are you tempted to brag about?

How does the reminder that it all comes from God anyway help to not to brag or boast?

Close in prayer...that God will help us be more kind, loving and unified.