

Series: Understanding the Body of Christ
Tonight's Lesson: Are You a Member of the One Body?

Introduction:

1. Since the world began, prophets have declared the fact that God would one day bring the restitution of all things on the earth. Peter taught Israel that this wonderful event would commence with the return of Jesus Christ to earth. **Acts 3:19-21**
 - This divine earthly kingdom would be vested in the nation of Israel, with the Davidic throne restored on the earth through Jesus Christ.
2. But hidden in God were some spiritual truths that Paul referred to as "the mystery." In this dispensation of grace, God is forming a brand new organism, called the church, the body of Christ. **Ephesians 3:1-6**
 - The prophetic plan involving Israel and the earth will still happen, but it has been temporarily postponed and suspended.
3. In this dispensation, a person is either:
 - Dead in their trespasses and sins - **Ephesians 2:1**
 - Alive in Christ - **Ephesians 2:4-5**
4. God is taking believers and bringing them into spiritual union with Jesus Christ, and forming the church, the body of Christ. **Ephesians 1:22-23**
5. Today, God accomplishes His work on the earth through the church, the body of Christ. **Ephesians 2:10**
6. It is absolutely crucial that every believer understand what God's Word teaches about the body of Christ. If not, we will never understand the purpose and plan of God for this dispensation of grace.
7. Here is the first foundational truth that every believer must grasp:

There is only one body of Christ, not many.

1. **Ephesians 4:4** makes this quite clear. It states, "*There is one body...*"
2. **Ephesians 2:15** refers to the body of Christ as "one new man."
 - The body of Christ has not replaced earthly Israel, as some people teach.
 - The body of Christ is a **new** living organism that previously did not exist.
3. The Bible is emphatic that every person who is saved is reconciled to God in **one** body. **Ephesians 2:16**
4. This destroys the notion that when the Bible speaks of the body of Christ, it is speaking of a particular local church.
 - This would mean that there would be as many bodies as there are local churches in the world.
 - This would not be one body, but several bodies.
 - If the body of Christ is speaking of a local church, there is another obvious problem. Because man cannot see the heart, every local church is sure to have some members in it that are lost. This would mean that there are lost members in the body of Christ. What an absurd thought!
5. It is obvious from Scripture that the body of Christ is far more encompassing than a local body of professing believers.
6. The body of Christ speaks of a heavenly, called out assembly of true believers that have been made one with Jesus Christ.

- There are some who recoil at this thought, saying that they do not believe in the idea of an invisible church.
7. According to **Ephesians 1:22-23**, how does Paul define the church? He defines it as Christ's body.
 - All who are part of Christ's body have been raised up and **seated** in heavenly places. **Ephesians 2:6**
 - You and I are not able to physically see who is seated in that heavenly called out assembly. Only God knows this. **2 Timothy 2:19** states, "*The Lord knoweth them that are his.*"
 - If somebody doesn't like the term "invisible church" we could probably more accurately call the body of Christ the "heavenly church," but we cannot deny the truth of it.
 8. Paul was a member of the **local** church at Antioch (**Acts 13:1-3**), yet he claimed to be a member of the same body as believers at Rome (**Romans 12:3-5**), Corinth (**1 Corinthians 10:16-17**), and Ephesus (**Ephesians 5:30**). Paul had never even been to Rome.
 9. Paul is writing to a group of local assemblies in Galatia (**Galatians 1:2**), yet he declares that they are all one in Christ Jesus. **Galatians 3:26-28**
 - You become part of the one body by faith alone in Jesus Christ.
 - The moment a believing sinner trusts Jesus Christ, God's Spirit baptizes him into a living union with Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:10**
 - In the church, the body of Christ, there is no racial, physical, or gender distinctions.
 - A believer is not a spiritual Jew, and the church is not spiritual Israel.
 - In the local, visible assembly there are physical and gender distinctions that Paul recognizes (**1 Timothy 2:12, 5:1-2, 6:1-2**), but not in the heavenly assembly.
 10. Local churches should be composed of individuals who have been made one with Christ (through Spirit baptism) and are members of the one body, the heavenly church.
 11. Believers of the heavenly church come together in a local church for the purpose of studying God's Word together, edifying one another, praying for one another, and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Philippians 1:27**
 12. The most crucial question that every person must ask himself is not, "Am I a member of a local church, and have I been baptized in water by a local church?"
 13. The question is, "Have I trusted Christ as my Savior and been brought into a spiritual union with Jesus Christ and become a member of the one body, the body of Christ?"

Series: Understanding the Body of Christ
Tonight's Lesson: When Did the Body of Christ Begin?

Introduction:

1. Today, God is taking believers in Christ and placing them into spiritual union with Jesus Christ and forming what the Bible calls *"the church, which is his body."*
Ephesians 1:22-23
2. Today, God is accomplishing His work on the earth through the church, the body of Christ. **Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8**
3. As members of the body of Christ, believers must be rooted and grounded in an understanding of what the Bible teaches about the body of Christ. If not, we will never understand the purpose and plan of God for this dispensation of grace.
4. In tonight's lesson, we will examine of the subject of when the body of Christ began. There is so much debate over this issue.
 - Some say it began in the gospels (Matthew-John).
 - Some say it began in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost.
 - Some would say it began in Acts 9 when Paul was saved.
 - Some would say it began in Acts 13 when Paul first preached the gospel of Christ and left Israel to go to the Gentiles.
 - Some would say it began after Acts 28 when Paul turned from Israel with finality and went to the Gentiles.
5. We will examine two important truths, and hopefully bring some clarity to this important issue.

First, the body of Christ could not begin until the finished work of Christ was accomplished.

1. How does a person get into the body of Christ?
 - The moment a person places his faith and trust in Christ's finished work, the Holy Spirit enters into him and baptizes him into Christ. **Ephesians 1:12-13, 2:8-10**
 - The believer is placed into a spiritual, living union with Jesus Christ. Members of the body of Christ are identified in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. **Romans 6:3-4**
 - We now possess the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. **Romans 6:11, 8:11**
2. Here is the point: There is no way that a person could be baptized by God's Spirit into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ until it first occurred.
3. The body of Christ was not present in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Christ was dealing with the nation of Israel. There was a wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles that had been erected through the law of Moses and the rite of circumcision.
4. In the body of Christ, we learn that there is no Jew or Gentile. We are all one in Christ. The middle wall of partition has come down. **Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:14**
5. How did God accomplish the breaking down of that wall and the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into one body? According to **Ephesians 2:16**, Christ accomplished this *"by the cross."*

6. Christ kept the law in totality, but then bore its curse (death) for you and me. He took it out of the way, thereby removing the middle wall between Jews (who had the law but broke it) and Gentiles (who did not have the law). **Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14**
7. The Bible is clear: The church, the body of Christ, could not possibly begin until Christ's finished work.
 - The cross removed the enmity of the law that would have cursed us with eternal death.
 - The resurrection provides a living union with Christ for all those who believe on Him.

Second, the body of Christ was not revealed until the apostle Paul.

1. The idea of "the body of Christ," composed of saved Jews and Gentiles, is the exclusive domain of the apostle Paul.
 - For example, there is not even a reference to the church, the body of Christ, in the Hebrew epistles (Hebrews-Jude).
 - The twelve did not even attempt to evangelize Gentiles. They confined their ministry exclusively to Israel, with the one exception of Peter's visit to Cornelius in Acts 10.
2. We live in the dispensation of grace. God is offering grace to Jews and Gentiles on an equal basis and placing believers into a living union with Jesus Christ, forming a new organism called the body of Christ.
3. This truth was revealed to Paul after his salvation in Acts 9. **Colossians 1:24-28; Ephesians 3:1-9**
4. Notice how many times, just in the book of Colossians, Paul refers to the church, the body of Christ. 1:18, 1:24, 2:17, 2:19, 3:15
5. Did the Holy Spirit baptize believers into the body of Jesus Christ before Paul showed up? It is possible that God did this without revealing it to anybody. **Romans 16:7; Galatians 1:22**
6. But there are two truths that we must accept and understand:
 - The body of Christ could not begin until after the finished work of Christ.
 - The body of Christ was not **revealed** until the apostle Paul.
7. If the church, the body of Christ, was Paul's doctrinal domain, where would we look to find sound doctrine that fits for us today? Paul's epistles (Romans through Philemon) constitute sound doctrine for the body of Christ today.

Series: Understanding the Body of Christ
Tonight's Lesson: Rightly Dividing the Body of Christ

Introduction:

1. In time past, God worked on the earth through the agency of the nation of Israel. This is not the case today.
2. Today, God is working through a living organism, a new creation called the church, the body of Christ.
 - **1 Corinthians 12:13** proclaims, *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..."*
 - **1 Corinthians 12:27** states, *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*
3. All those who believe on Jesus Christ are placed into a spiritual union with Christ at the very moment of salvation. We become members of the church, which is His body. **Ephesians 1:22-23**
4. In tonight's lesson, we will consider three important principles in rightly dividing the church, the body of Christ.

Never confuse the future kingdom church with the church, the body of Christ.

1. The word "church" does not always refer to the body of Christ. The word "church" can have a variety of applications.
 - The word "church" simply means "called out." It carries the idea of an assembly.
 - It can refer to a **local** assembly of professing believers or the **heavenly** assembly of true believers that have been seated in heavenly places.
 - It is also used in reference to the nation of Israel when God called them out of Egypt into the wilderness. **Acts 7:36, 38**
2. The word "church" is also used twice in the book of Matthew (16:18, 18:17). Because of this, some people have assumed that either:
 - The church, the body of Christ, began in the gospels (Matthew - John)
 - Or Christ was laying down (in the gospels) the structure for the future church of this dispensation of grace.
 - Neither one of these assumptions is correct.
3. The entire context of the book of Matthew is preparation for the coming kingdom church. **Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:6-7, 19:27-28**
4. The kingdom that was to come from heaven to earth is mentioned over fifty times in the book of Matthew.
5. Christ did not come to earth to establish the church, the body of Christ. He came to establish the Messianic church, in which Christ would rule and reign as King over all the earth. **Matthew 25:31-32**
6. This kingdom church was talked about, explained repeatedly, and was prophesied in great detail. It is what the disciples were expecting and anticipating. **Acts 1:6**
7. The truth of the body of Christ is said to be a mystery that was hid from ages and from generations. **Colossians 1:24-26**

Christ is the Head over the Body of Christ.

1. The kingdom church will be built upon the foundation of Christ ruling and reigning on earth as the visible Messiah. **Zechariah 14:9, 16; Matthew 25:31-32**
2. Today, the church, the body of Christ, is being built upon the foundation of Christ (rejected on earth) exalted in heavenly places as Head of the body.
Ephesians 1:20-23
3. As members of His body, we have the unique privilege of being in Christ. This means that we, too, are exalted and seated in heavenly places. **Ephesians 2:6**
4. Unlike the future kingdom church, we do not know Christ after the flesh in a visible, physical way. **2 Corinthians 5:16**
5. We have spiritually been raised with Him in the heavenlies, and our life is hid with Christ in God. One day when He appears at the rapture, we will appear with Him in glory. **Colossians 3:1-4**
6. The church, the body of Christ, is built upon the truth of Christ, exalted at the right hand of the Father as our heavenly Head. **Colossians 1:18**
7. The future kingdom church will be built upon the truth of Christ, as conquering Messiah and King. **Matthew 16:15-18**
 - It is on this declaration of Jesus as the Christ that the kingdom church will be built.
 - One side-note: isn't it interesting that Jesus doesn't say, "Satan will not prevail against it."
 - We know that today Satan is our adversary and seeks to hinder the body of Christ in everything today. Sometimes Satan **does** prevail.
1 Thessalonians 2:18; 1 Timothy 5:14-15; 2 Timothy 2:26
 - Why would Jesus use the term "gates of hell" when referring to the future kingdom church?
 - Where will Satan be when Christ returns and the kingdom church is established on earth? He will be shut up inside the gates of hell with a seal upon him that he should deceive the nations no more. **Revelation 20:1-3**
 - Christ's servants will be able to teach God's Word to the nations with absolutely no Satanic influence or hindrance. Satan may roar inside the gates of hell, but it will be to no avail.

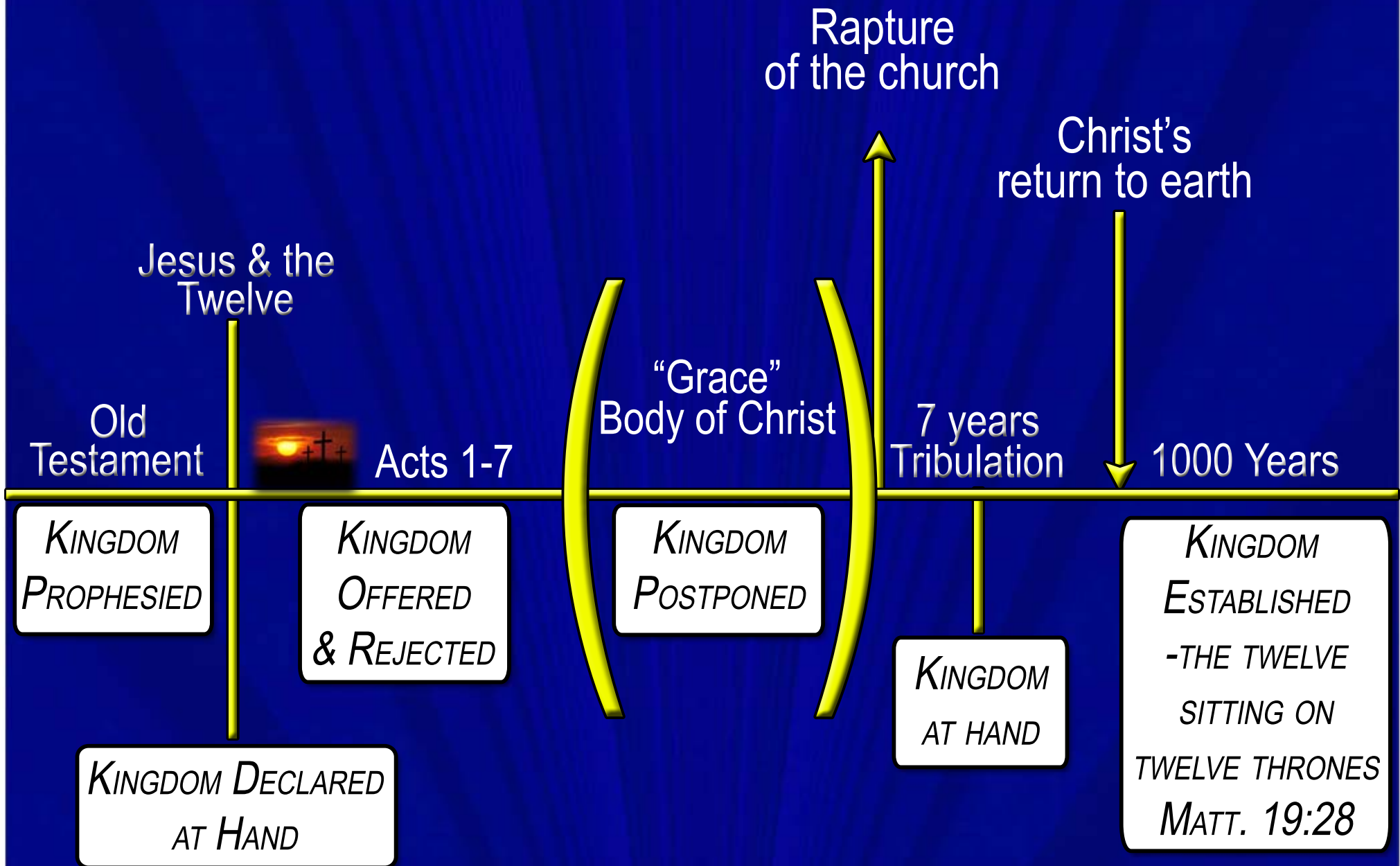
The Holy Spirit places members into the body of Christ.

1. How does a person become part of the body of Christ? Is it by performing good works, joining a local church, being baptized in water, performing a series of religious rituals?
2. **1 Corinthians 12:13** states that "...by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..."
3. In order to get into the body, the Holy Spirit must place you and identify you in the body. How does the Holy Spirit decide who to place in the body of Christ?
4. The Bible is clear - the Holy Spirit immediately baptizes a person into Christ the moment that person exercises believing faith in Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26-27**

5. The moment a person trusts Christ, a spiritual operation of God takes place whereby the believing sinner is completely cleansed of all sin, and given the life of Christ.
Colossians 2:11-13
6. Are you thankful to be a part of the body of Christ? What a position we have in Christ! **Colossians 2:9-10**

(Scroll down to see Bible Study chart.)

KINGDOM POSTPONED



Series: Understanding the Body of Christ
Tonight's Lesson: The Importance of Christ's Exaltation

Introduction:

1. In time past, God accomplished His work on earth through the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel is an earthly people with earthly promises, and the promise of an earthly kingdom.
 - One day all of these promises will be fulfilled when Christ returns to earth and reigns in Jerusalem as Israel's Messiah and King.
2. Today, Israel's kingdom program has been temporarily postponed, and God is forming and working through a living organism, a new creation called the church, the body of Christ.
3. The body of Christ is not given earthly promises, but heavenly. We are said to possess all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. **Ephesians 1:3**
4. All of these blessings rest upon the truth of Christ's exaltation in the heavenly places. Forty days after Christ's resurrection, He ascended into the heavens and was exalted.
 - Ascension - refers to Christ ascending into the heavenlies in His resurrection body.
 - Exaltation - refers to the act of the Father by which He gave to the risen and ascended Christ the position of honor and power at His own right hand.
Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:20-23
5. It is on the basis of Christ's exaltation that the body of Christ can receive spiritual blessings.

Because He has been exalted, we can have forgiveness of sins.

1. After Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins, He was exalted to the right hand of the Father and sat down. **Hebrews 10:12, 1:3, 12:2; Ephesians 1:20**
2. When Jesus sat down in this exalted position, it spoke of His work of redemption as being complete and finished.
 - **Illustration:** husbands - when you are working around the house and doing a list of jobs that your wife has given you, you don't dare sit down until the work is done.
3. Christ's redemptive work fully satisfied the Father, so the Father sat Him down at His right hand.
4. Because Christ's sacrifice for sin fully satisfied the Father, forgiveness of sin can now be offered to mankind. **Acts 5:31, 13:37-39; Ephesians 1:20-2:1**
5. Forgiveness of sin is not something that we work for; it is something that we rejoice in as a sure fact. Just as sure as Christ is exalted in heavenly places is the truth of our total and complete forgiveness in Christ. **Ephesians 1:7**

Because He has been exalted, we can now receive God's indwelling Holy Spirit.

1. Jesus taught the twelve that He could not send the Holy Spirit until He went away. **John 16:7, 14:16-17**
 - After Christ was exalted in heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit in Acts 2. **Acts 2:33**

2. Later, it was revealed through Paul that the moment a person believes on Christ, God's Spirit immediately indwells that individual. **Ephesians 1:12-13, 4:30**
3. Because Christ is exalted, God has shed forth the Holy Spirit **abundantly** to those who believe on Christ. **Titus 3:5-6**
 - The word "shed" means "to pour forth, bestow, gush out."
 - We don't receive part of the Holy Spirit at salvation; we get all of Him!
4. What is the basis on which God can give us His very Spirit and life? **Titus 3:6** says that it is "...*through Jesus Christ our Savior.*"
5. We don't receive the Holy Spirit by **doing**, but by resting in the One who is exalted and seated at the right hand of the Father. **Titus 3:5**

Because He has been exalted, we now have an intercessor to God the Father.

1. What is Christ currently doing right now at the right hand of the Father? (**Romans 8:34**) He is making intercession for members of the body of Christ.
 - An intercessor is a go-between. He pleads the case of another.
2. When Satan tries to bring condemning accusations against us, Christ intercedes for us. His exaltation insures that nothing or nobody can separate us from God's love. **Romans 8:35-39**
 - Our intercessor has **power**. **Ephesians 1:20-23**
 - He is the Head of the body and holds all power.
 - Our intercessor has **compassion**. **Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:14-16**
 - The exalted Christ is no longer subject to poverty, pain, weariness, suffering, etc.
 - Yet, He understands all my sufferings, all my tears, all my loneliness, all my weariness, for He Himself has endured them.
 - Christ brought back to the right hand of the Father His glorified humanity, therefore He can understand what I, as a man, go through.
3. Our intercessor has power and compassion - what a combination! What an intercessor!

In Conclusion:

1. If you are a member of the body of Christ, this means that you are **in Christ**. His history becomes your history. What is true of Him is true of you. You are dead, buried, and raised with Him. **Colossians 2:12-13**
2. But it doesn't stop there. After He rose from the dead, Christ was exalted in heavenly places. Because we are in Christ, we too have been raised up and seated in heavenly places. **Ephesians 2:6**
3. We now possess all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. They are ours forever. How do we know this? Look at **Ephesians 1:3**. What are the last two words? In Christ!

Series: Understanding the Body of Christ
Tonight's Lesson: How the Body of Christ Can Function Effectively

Introduction:

1. In time past, God worked on the earth through the nation of Israel, but now God is doing something different. He is working on the earth through a new and living organism called the church, the body of Christ.
2. The body of Christ is not a denomination, a religious system, or some organization.
3. The body of Christ is composed of believers in Christ who have been brought together into a spiritual union by God's Holy Spirit. Christ is our Head (**Colossians 1:18**) and Christ is our life (**Colossians 3:4**).
4. In this series, we have examined several different doctrinal issues concerning the body of Christ, but tonight we will examine an extremely practical portion of Scripture dealing with the functioning of the body of Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:12-31**
5. How can the body of Christ function effectively within the context of a local assembly of believers?

First, we must learn to appreciate the diversity of Christ's body. vs. 12-14

1. How many physical bodies do you have? Of course, just one. But how many various members do you have that make up your body? Many.
2. Verse 12 says, "...so also is Christ" speaking of the body of Christ. vs. 14, cf. vs. 27
3. **One** Spirit (God's Spirit) baptized all of us into **one** body (in Christ). vs. 13
 - Sin had left us all barren, dry, and thirsty. But all of us have tasted and partaken of the same fountain. The living Fountain of God's Spirit has refreshed and restored us. vs. 12; cf. **John 4:14, 7:37-39**
4. But notice the diversity in the body. Verse 12 speaks of Jews, Gentiles, bond, and free.
5. God is not in the cookie-cutter business. Verse 14 declares that there is **one** body, but **many** members. There is diversity in the body of Christ just as there is in your physical body and in your physical family.
6. Let me make it clear: to function within the body of Christ effectively you have to learn to get along with people who are **different** than you.
7. Many people sit at home and have no influence for Christ because they have never learned this principle. Somebody ticked them off, hurt their feelings, didn't pat them on the back, and they took their marbles and went home. What a shame.
8. Do you desire to be a servant of the Lord in the body of Christ? **2 Timothy 2:24** would be a great verse to commit to memory. Sometimes fellow Christians can make you scratch your head, but instead of being resentful, learn to appreciate the diversity.

Second, we must value our contribution to Christ's body. vs. 15-20

1. Every believer has a role to play in the functioning of Christ's body on earth. But all of us are built differently and have a different role to play.
2. Paul again uses the illustration of a physical body in verses 15-17. The idea is somebody who is unhappy and disappointed with his function in the body.

3. Do you know what will totally frustrate you in your walk with Christ? When you try to be something you are not. If I try to use my hands as I would my feet, imagine the frustration. Or, if I tried to use my feet as I would my hands, how upsetting it would be.
4. Don't try to be somebody else - you be who God made you in Christ. You cannot sit around wishing you were another member of the body. You have a function to perform and your passion should be to perform that function well and in harmony with the rest. God placed you into the body as it has pleased Him. vs. 18
5. Every member cannot fulfill the same function. If they did, the body of Christ would be greatly hindered in its work. vs. 19-20

Third, we must recognize our need for every member of Christ's body. vs. 21-27

1. Paul dealt with those in the body who feel **inferior** to other members and assured them that their contribution was vital (vs. 15-17). But now Paul deals with those who think they are **superior** to other members of the body. vs. 21-22
2. C.R. Stam writes, "The man with the inferiority complex questions whether he even belongs to the body, while the man with the superiority complex acts as if he thinks he is the whole body."
 - The first guy says, "I am not of the body."
 - The second guy says, "I have no need of you."
3. Remember this Christian, while you **are** a vital member of the body, you are just **one** of its many members. Paul said that every member is necessary (vs. 22).
4. **Illustration:** What is the most important member of your physical body? Probably your head. It gives direction to the rest of the body. But imagine if that was the **only** member you had. Your head is just sitting there on the pew (just a big brain). You couldn't do anything. It needs the other members to accomplish anything.
5. This passage (verse 23-27) gives us the picture of different members of the body valuing and esteeming one another highly. Those members who receive more limelight and recognition bestow more abundant honor on those members that are behind the scenes getting the job done (vs. 23).
6. Why do we do this? Because that is God's attitude and heart. vs. 24
7. God desires for us to recognize and appreciate diversity within the body, but maintain an attitude of oneness of heart and mind with one another. vs. 25-27
8. This passage reveals to us the attitudes of grace that we should possess as members of the body of Christ. We need each other and our actions and attitudes should reflect this.

In Conclusion:

1. God had given different gifts to different people within the church at Corinth. God lists the communication gifts first, and "*after that*" the confirmation sign gifts that He bestowed during the Acts time period. vs. 28
2. The Corinthians were caught up in the miraculous sign gifts and were not valuing other members of the body and their contribution to the body.
3. When Paul talks about "coveting the best gifts" in verse 31, he is not talking about individuals wishing they had somebody else's gift. He is saying that corporately, as

a church, they needed to value the communication gifts far more than the confirmation sign gifts. He will explain why in chapters 13 and 14.

4. Christian, you are a vital member of Christ's body. Fulfill your role and esteem highly others in their contribution to the body.