
▷ INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be part of the church—the Body of Christ? This is our focus for this week. Paul makes a very direct statement: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). We want to understand more of what this means. How does it affect how we relate with each other within the church? How does it shape the way we think and act?

The concept of a corporate body who are God’s people first appears in the story of Israel in Egypt (Exodus 3:7). Throughout the story of Abraham, God promised that He would make them a great nation. Then He called them out of Egypt and delivered them miraculously and led them into the Promised Land. God claimed them as His people, fulfilling His promise to Abraham. It is important to note that their identity as God’s people was based on divine action and calling, not on their performance. God’s gracious act made them His people.

Paul presented an extended comparison between Christian believers and Israel in Romans 9-11. He stated very clearly, “It is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Romans 9:8, NIV). Scripture makes a transition from being God’s people in the Old Testament to being the Church in the New Testament. The focus is directly on the spiritual connection rather than biological descent. The church becomes the “Body of Christ” through His divine act. It carries His name because of His calling rather than human choice.

Paul then made a transition to the implications for how we live. Because we are the “Body of Christ,” our behavior will be transformed by our new identity. Who we are in Christ has a direct impact on our choices and actions. In fact, throughout all His writings, this becomes the motivating point for the daily Christian life. Our identity as part of “the Body” and our connection to Christ as the head of that “Body” transform our performance.

Throughout this week, we will explore how our new identity in Christ changes the way we look at and deal with each other as Christians. Jesus stated, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35, NIV). We will treat each other differently because we are connected in Christ. We have a new identity as part of the “Body of Christ”—the Church.

This broad concept has serious implications for how we should think and behave. Our current culture emphasizes the “rights” of the individual. The biblical model of the church emphasizes the privilege and responsibility of being part of a greater entity—the Church. In a very real sense, when we become one with Christ, our identity changes. We are now part of His Body. We can no longer think of ourselves in isolation. Our perspective must change. We are a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Part of that new creation is our connection to each other as part of the Body.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR THIS WEEK

Our purpose for this week is to better understand what it means to be part of God's Church. Therefore we want to:

- Explore the meaning of the Church as the Body of Christ.
- Discover our new identity as members of the Body of Christ.
- Identify biblical ways of functioning as the Church.

▷ HOLY HABIT—MEDITATION

The *Holy Habit* we want to highlight today is meditation. This is a common term in our world today. It can mean several different things. For our study we want to focus on biblical meditation. In this context it means focusing our minds and hearts on God by quieting our minds and using our imagination to focus on God and His Word. It is not emptying our minds or focusing on some universal “nothingness.” Instead it is filling our minds with God and His Word.

NARRATIVE MEDITATION is the practice of purposefully controlling your imagination and focusing on a specific story from a consistent perspective in an attempt to experience as much of what happened in that story as possible.

The following points are helpful in narrative meditation:

- It is crucial that we control and guide the imagination. We never want to surrender our will or thought process to the imagination.
- Focus on a biblical story from the perspective of an observer or one of the story characters. Choose one of the characters and try to put yourself in that person's place.
- Using the imagination to envision what the Bible character experienced.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT is that we get in touch with the story and it becomes real to us.

WHAT IS NOT IMPORTANT is that we see or experience everything in a story in the same way as someone else.

NOTE: Your experience will be unique to you because of your own background and personality.

The imagination is the primary tool in meditation. It is the most creative part of our minds. God gave us this tool to allow us to go beyond the limits of the routine of everyday life. However, the imagination needs to be informed and controlled.

Here are some key points to help us in guiding our imaginations:

1. Use your will to focus your thoughts.
2. Let past experience and knowledge inform your imagination.
3. Let Scripture control or provide the boundaries for your imagination.

Here are some helpful steps to guide us in meditation:

1. Start with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide.
2. Read the story in the Bible and any background material you have.
3. Imagine you were present.
4. Try to see, hear, and feel the details.
5. Be true to the biblical facts.
6. Give yourself adequate time.
7. When finished with the meditation, pause to reflect on what you have experienced.
 - a. What new insights did you gain?
 - b. What feelings did you experience?
 - c. What new insights about God did you gain?
 - d. What can you apply to your life?

▷ **SUGGESTED PRAYER**

Here is the suggested prayer to help us begin this week's **Steps to Discipleship** study process:

Dear Father in Heaven, I come to you recognizing my constant need for your presence in my life. I thank you for the many blessings you have given me. I especially thank you for the opportunity to be part of a spiritual family. Please help me understand what it means to be the Church as the Body of Christ. Help me learn to function as part of this Body. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LIST BELOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH IN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP WALK WITH GOD THIS WEEK:

▷ TODAY’S OBJECTIVE

Scripture uses several terms to describe the Church. The most common is the metaphor of the “Body of Christ.” We begin this week by studying what it means to be the Church.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Dear Lord, Help me in my walk with you today. Open my mind that I might understand what it means to be part of your Church. Give me a vision of what you want us to become. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE

Today we start learning memory verse #11. We will continue to follow the process we have been using for the last five weeks.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NIV)—“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

1 Corinthians 3:16 (KJV)—“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We also want to review two verses today. The first is #4 (1 John 5:13) from week 2. The second is #10 from last week (1 Peter 3:15).

Choose one of the review verses and spend a few minutes in quiet reflection. What impressions come to your mind as you prayerfully think about this passage?

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

It is time to open God's Word and reflect on what He has to say about His Church.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:9, 16-17—What does it mean for you, as part of the church, to be God's temple? How can this make a difference in the way you will live today?

READ EPHESIANS 5:23-27— Compare this passage with Ephesians 4:11-16. What do these passages tell you about God's goal for His Church?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27—Especially notice verse 27. What points can we learn from these verses about how to live as God's Church?

▷ COMMITMENT PRAYER

Loving God, Help me understand what it means to be part of the "Body of Christ." Help me learn to function as part of this "Body." Help me to walk with you throughout this day. Make my life a reflection of your love and presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Understanding how we are connected to Christ as the Head of His Church and how the Church is built on Christ are the objectives of our study for today.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, I open my heart to you today. I seek to know you better. I want to understand more of what it means to be part of your Church. Help me to see Jesus as the foundation of this Church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We have two verses to review today, #8 (2 Peter 1:3-4) and our verse from yesterday #11 (1 Corinthians 3:16). Take a few minutes to review these two passages. Then reflect on them and make notes of how they can make a difference for your life today.

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

We will now turn to the Bible to explore Christ's role in the Church. We especially want to understand the implications for how we function as a church.

READ MATTHEW 16:13-19—Why is Jesus' identity so important in this story? How is the confession that Jesus is the Christ the foundation for His Church?

What are the implications of the authority Jesus gives to His church in verse 19?

READ EPHESIANS 1:17-23—What does this passage tell us Paul wants for believers?

What does this passage tell us about Jesus and His relationship to the Church?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Almighty God and Father in Heaven, You have given us your Church. In fact, we are your Church. Thank you for the privilege of being part of the spiritual body of Christ. Help us live out the reality of our new identity in Christ. Help us submit to Jesus as Head of the Church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Today's objective is to understand how being part of God's Church connects us to each other. We want to begin to explore the implications for how we are to live as the Church.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Dear Loving Father, Help me be open to your presence today. Help me realize how much you want to be involved in my life. Thank you for your Church. Help me to know how to live as part of the "Body of Christ." In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Today we want to review memory verse #5 (Proverbs 3:5-6) from week 3 and verse #11 (1 Corinthians 3:16) from this week. Pause and reflect on how the truths in these verses can make a difference in your life today.

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

Once again, it is time to open God's Word for study and reflection. Let's seek to make this study an ongoing dialogue with God in prayer as we study and reflect on the following passages.

READ ACTS 2:41-47—What points from this passage speak to your heart today? What can you apply to your personal thinking about how we can function as a church?

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22—Focus especially on verses 19-22. What do these verses tell us about our relationships within the church?

READ EPHESIANS 4:11-16—What does this passage tell us about God’s vision for His Church? What implications does it have for us today?

READ HEBREWS 10:24-25—How can the points in these verses help guide us in our participation in church life?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Dear Lord and God, You have made me part of your Church. This can only be true as I stay connected to Christ, the Head of the Church. Help me walk with you throughout this day. Help me keep my mind focused on you throughout this day. Teach me to love others just as you love me. In Jesus’ name. Amen

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Our focus for today is on pointers from Scripture that will help us function together as God's Church. We want to understand important principles for daily life in the Church.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

God of Love, Take my life today and make it a place where you dwell. Transform my day with your presence and power. Teach me from your Word what it means to be part of your Church. Help me to contribute to your Church and not just take. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE

Today we begin learning memory verse #12. We will continue using the process we have for the last 5 weeks. Once again, write it out on a card you can take with you throughout the day.

Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV)—“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6:1-2 (KJV)—“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We also want to review memory verse #9 (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) from week 5. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the foundational points from this passage. What more does this tell you about your relationship with God, as well as His Church?

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

Once more it is time to go to Scripture for our daily study and reflection. Ask God to give you insights as to how we can function as His Church.

READ ROMANS 12:1-3 AND 9-18—What key points do these verses teach us about relationships within the Church?

READ MATTHEW 5:23-24 AND 18:15-18—What do these passages teach us about dealing with problems within the Church? What would happen if we put these principles to work?

READ GALATIANS 6:1-2—What can we learn from this passage about dealing with people who are struggling?

Who do you know that is struggling spiritually? List them here and include them in your prayers. Think of ways in which you can walk beside them in love.

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Almighty God, Teach me today to reach out to the weak. Walk beside me and help me love those around me. Transform my day and life with your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Our objective for today is to look at Jesus' specific counsel about serving one another. We want to become more like Jesus in the way we relate to others in God's Church.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Dear Lord, This is your Church. Help me to understand more of what it means to be a part of this Church. Guide my study today. Teach me to love and serve as Jesus' did. In Jesus' name. Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We are reviewing the two verses from this week, #11 (1 Corinthians 3:16) and verse #12 (Galatians 6:1-2). Spend a few minutes reflecting on additional points you have learned from these passages.

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

We want to open our minds to God's Word as we go deeper in our study and reflection for today.

READ JOHN 13:1-17—What does this story teach you about your role in the Church? How can Jesus' model shape your life and ministry?

READ MARK 10:35-44—Use your imagination to place yourself in this story. In what ways can you identify with James and John here?

What insights from verses 42-44 are especially meaningful to you, and why?

READ LUKE 9:46-48—How would you define true greatness within the family of God in light of this passage?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

God and Father of all, Transform my day with your presence. Teach me that true greatness comes in following Jesus in a life of service. Help me change the way I see others. Open my life and love others through me today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

As members of God's Church, we are part of a larger body. We cannot live in isolation from those around us. Today's study takes us deeper in understanding our responsibility in working with others.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Almighty God, Teach me to live as Jesus lived. Help me to understand who I am as part of your Church. Help me learn what it means to submit. I know it will not be easy. So I ask for your help and divine strength. In Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Today we review memory verse #12 (Galatians 6:1-2). Spend a few minutes reflecting on how the points from this passage can become more a part of your life.

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

It is now time to open your Bible and explore a deeper dimension of your relationship with God and His Church. Ask God for special wisdom as you study the subject of today.

READ 1 PETER 2:4-5 AND 9-10—What do these verses teach you about who you are in Christ? What is your role in this process? What is God's role?

READ EPHESIANS 5:15-21—What do you think God wants you to learn from these verses?

READ ROMANS 14:1, 7-8—What can you learn from these verses? How could this change the way you relate with others in the Church?

READ ROMANS 14:13-15, 19—What are the implications of these verses for your life?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Loving Lord, Help me to understand my responsibility in working with others. Help me submit my desires and preferences to the needs of others and to you as Lord. Walk with me through this day. Teach me with your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This week's study has taken us into an area with which we are not very familiar. Our society focuses on our roles and rights as individuals. The biblical concept of the Church confronts us with a new identity—that we are part of the Body of Christ. Our relationship with God changes our relationships with the rest of His family. Spend the next few minutes reflecting on what this week's study can mean to our journey together.

How has your daily time with God affected your life this week? What difference is it making in the way you live?

Where have you experienced challenges to your discipleship during this past week?

How is what God has done for you starting to impact your life?

Who has God placed in your life as part of the church with whom you might have some difficulty? How can what Jesus has done for you change the way you think of them?

How would you like to see God work in your life during the next week?
