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TRAINING MEMBERS OF KENNERLY ROAD BAPTIST
CHURCH IN IRMO, SOUTH CAROLINA, TO
UNDERSTAND UNION WITH CHRIST AS
A BASIS FOR BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

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To my wife, Beth Ann, and our three arrows, Ian, Hailey, and Aaron.

This is only possible by God's grace and your love and support.

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PREFACE

This has been a long and winding journey that can only be counted as the grace of God to have come to an end. Many years ago, while sitting in night classes at Arlington Bible College, I dreamed of being equipped to minister to the bride of Christ. At the time, it seemed like only a hope, dream, and prayer. Now, many years later, I am amazed at God's kindness to have made this opportunity possible, to have made a dream come true, and to fulfill furtive prayers. Few things have convinced me more of my insufficiency than pastoral ministry and doctoral work. This project is the result of God's grace alone.

Each professor has poured into my life from Dr. Newman in college with encouragements to keep at the work, to my first excursions in systematic theology with Dr. Fowler. Southern has proven a safe theological haven and a place of ministry mentoring and I am profoundly thankful for Dr. Purcell and Dr. Bowen for their counsel and support. Andrew and Denver have been there all along the way with timely encouragement, correction, and instruction as we have journeyed together through this program.

Dr. Timothy Paul Jones began to influence me through his writing and then as my supervisor for this project through his personal care and encouragement. He has helped me to hone my project, clarify my thinking, and serve the church God has called me to in a better way. I am deeply indebted to him for his kind ministry in my life.

My family believed this could happen when I did not, encouraged me when I felt insufficient, and loved me when I had to be gone. Ian, Hailey, and Aaron are gifts from God, and I am thankful for their friendship and the privilege of being their Dad. There is no one who needs and accepts shepherding care from Jesus through me like they do. No one has been a greater life-giving friend to me than my wife, Beth Ann. She

constantly amazes me with her spiritual endurance, faithfulness to God, and love for me. This project is as much hers as it is mine. We both know it is God's.

May God somehow see fit to use this project to draw believers into tighter community as they live out the joy of their union with Christ.

Steve Johns

Irmo, South Carolina

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The theme verse of Kennerly Road Baptist Church (KRBC) has always been John 17:17: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”¹ This guideline on a Word-centered life for the church and its members has been stretched and even broken in its history. A core verse alone could not ensure the authority of the Bible in the decisions and life of the church. Experience, tradition, and preference became the rule in personal lives as well as church life. Returning to its roots of finding authority in the text of Scripture has brought reformation in the church. This reformation has found its limits in the individual lives of the people of KRBC. They are products of two cultures: the culture of a society that finds identity in feelings and experiences, and a fundamentalist culture that finds identity in tradition and preference. An understanding and practical realizing of a personal identity in Christ is lacking. For the church to be ruled by Scripture corporately, it must have people who find their identity in Christ instead of feelings and preference on one side or experience and tradition on the other side. The need for concerted teaching on the believer’s identity in Christ, understood theologically as their union with Christ, has become apparent.

Context

KRBC was planted in 1991 in the Irmo suburb of Columbia, South Carolina. In an area already full of churches that preached the gospel, there was a desire to plant a church ruled by the authority of Scripture. Other churches in the area were viewed as products of post-modernist evangelicalism with a seeker sensitive philosophy, bound by

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

unhealthy denominational affiliations, or ruled by unhealthy legalistic traditions. KRBC identified itself as distinct from other churches through its fundamentalist heritage.

KRBC's sense of self as a church and as Christians was defined by what they would not do or did not believe in contrast with others around them. Its members were united as a community by what they were not as much as they were by their union with Christ.

The church was initially founded largely by graduates of Bob Jones University (BJU) who saw themselves as balanced theologically and were passionate about exegetical preaching and held an evangelistic zeal. The church was marked by exegetically deep preaching and a strong sense of being a family. Their combined efforts of planting a church with its sacrifices, served as a unique bonding experience and was foundational to their sense of community. This first phase came to an end with the departure of the church's founding pastor nine years after its inception in 2000.

The second phase of the church began in 2001 with the installation of its second pastor. This second pastor led the church toward a legalistic philosophy and methodology of ministry. The expressions of this new direction were fleshed out in restrictions on use of Bible translations, dress code guidelines, a centering of authority on the senior pastor, and a move away from relational evangelism to program-oriented evangelistic attempts. The church experienced rapid growth from roughly 70 to 300 in the span of seven years, even as the majority of the original church and most of its leaders left for other churches in the area. Decision making in the church became tradition based while the proclamation of the Word became shallow, so there was a distancing from the authority of the Word over the church and in the lives of individuals. While growth had occurred, the relational connections that marked the church's first phase of the life had eroded significantly. In the face of sudden growth, the struggle to survive and thrive that had been so binding was no longer present. Various factions of the church now existed based on areas of liberty. Identity was now about standards and enjoying comradery with people who agreed on non-essentials instead of their union with Christ. In a manner

eerily similar to the Corinthian church, love for one another was replaced by fighting for rights. This phase concluded in 2011 with the compelled resignation of the senior pastor due to a pattern of integrity failures.

The third phase of KRBC was the result of a church split perpetuated by disgruntled members' loyalty to the departing pastor pitted against the deacon team left in leadership of the church. Positions were established based on whether the deacons were trusted in their integrity instead of on objective truth. While painful financially and relationally, the split opened the door for a return to ministry health. The remaining membership of the church committed themselves to once again being ruled by the authority of the Bible. The outworking of this commitment has been an twelve-year journey of church reformation with an emphasis on the church finding its identity in the Bible instead of tradition or legalism. After the hiring of the current pastor in 2011, the church has experienced the addition of 40 percent of its current membership who have been drawn to this renewed vision of church health even as it has slowly lost others who did not want to release their grip on tradition and legalism. It has been evident from this loss that the roots of legalistic and unbiblical philosophies promoted by the previous pastor had worked themselves into the lives of many of the people. The damage was not just on the visible level of the church or in its decisions. The wrong thinking had become the thinking of many within the church. With the unbiblical emphasis on standards had come the natural distrust of one another. There remains a fear to be honest about struggles, a resistance to confront and exhort each other, and a reluctance to embrace accountability with each other.

In a cultural context, KRBC exists in a heavily religious society where people tend to link spiritual identity with church affiliation. Denominational affiliation and the reputation of their local church are used as a means of identity instead of their union with Christ. The people of KRBC have assimilated this into their thinking which is expressed in their descriptions of self and others. This warped sense of self is the product of the origin

of the church in how it positioned itself and a long period of weak and wrong teaching, as well as the nature of religious southern culture.

Within the secular culture, all the errors of identity have found a home in the people of the church as well. Pierce Hibbs writes, “The lie espoused by contemporary culture is that our existence—the things we do, the experiences we have, the ensuing thoughts and feelings—defines who we are, our essence.”² Career, relationship status, academic achievement, and hobbies are used to understand self and define identity. Larger issues of political affiliation, gender roles, and human sexuality have become common conversations and counseling issues within the church. Decisions of relational spiritual investments in the lives of others are driven by convenience rather than joined identity sourced from their union with Christ.

Rationale

When the apostle Paul wrote to Corinth to address the ten issues present in that church,³ he addressed the infiltration of the Corinthian culture into Corinthians’ lives and practices.⁴ The issue of identity in Christ is the first truth that Paul brought to bear on their many errors (1 Cor 1:4-17). The Corinthians understanding of who they are in Christ had significant impact throughout the book and revealed itself as one source of their many errors. Where there is unbiblical cultural appropriation in KRBC, there is an identity problem. It is not enough for the church to commit to being ruled by the Bible. Changing polity to a plurality of elders, shifting translations of the Bible to be more approachable to the community, and recovering redeemed church membership are

² Pierce Taylor Hibbs, “A House Built upon the Rock: Finding Our Identity in Christ,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 28, no. 2 (2014): 55.

³ Andrew David Naselli, “The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians,” *Presbyterion* 44, no. 1 (2018): 100.

⁴ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 4-5.

wonderful changes, but none of these changes have significantly altered the way the members practice biblical community. The church members must grasp their own identity in Christ, which is a cultural expression of the theological reality of their union with Christ. While KRBC has made significant strides in its reformation, a number of potentially harmful underlying issues related to members' failure to grasp the implications of their union with Christ linger

One root issue in Corinth was a warped sense of identity. The church in Corinth attempted to find identity in the lives of preferred leaders, which took the focus off Christ (1 Cor 1:12-17). KRBC has experienced this very issue through varying degrees of loyalty to past and present pastors. The church in Corinth found identity in ministry successes or judged lack of obvious fruit as failure (1 Cor 3–4:5). Rightly viewing the departure of people unwilling to be ruled by the Word has been a painful and discouraging process for KRBC. This discouragement has led to apathy from some and isolation by others with a sense of failure that the church has not maintained or increased in growth over the years of reformation. Within Corinth there was a seeking for identity in spiritual gifting (1 Cor 12–14) so that division and arrogance entered the church. The elevation of some gifts and the failure of others to use their gifts affected the ability of the church to develop deep relational care (1 Cor 12:26). A failure of some to use their spiritual gifts by viewing them as unimportant or unnecessary has led to similar problems in the history of KRBC. Since union with Christ has not been the backbone of the community, there has been an apathy to serve one another. While KRBC does not have all the same resulting sin struggles as the church in Corinth, it has enough to see the need for a rigorous understanding of the believer's union with Christ with particular application to their understanding of biblical community. The next phase of life in KRBC needs to be not only a church ruled by the Bible but a church full of members who understand, embrace, and live out their union with Christ.

First, the members must understand that withdrawal from the lost does not produce holiness. Prior teaching they have received emphasized separation from the world as the key to becoming like Christ. This separation was from sin but extended to liberty areas of music, dress, and entertainment. This resulted in a withdrawal from neighbors and the surrounding community out of fear of being infected by their sin. The truth is that their union with Christ is their surest safeguard against sinful drift (Col 2:20–3:1). Where the members fear engaging their surrounding community relationally, there must be truth of their security in Christ because they are “found in him” (Phil 3:9). This should bring a freedom where they are operating as physically in the world but spiritually in Christ (John 17:14-16).

Second, there needs to be a renewed emphasis on each member discovering how to best serve to advance the kingdom of Christ. Ceasing to be consumers and instead being involved in both the mission of the church and the lives of one another is an outworking of who one is in Christ (1 Cor 12:12-26).

Third, there must be an understanding of union with Christ that lifts the members of KRBC above the trappings of this world (1 Cor 1:7-8; Titus 2:11-13). The heavy influence of a religiously lost culture that claims Christ but lives for the temporal weaves itself into the routines of daily life. It manifests in time management in family life, finding satisfaction in careers, and resistance to prioritizing church community relationships.

Fourth, the church needs to be equipped with an ongoing curriculum on union with Christ. Each phase of KRBC has depended on the influence of a single pastor. While the current phase has seen the implementation of a plurality of elders, the church remains at risk until they are firmly grounded in understanding who they are with Christ. Until that time, they are susceptible to the changing tides of culture both inside and outside of the church. A means of ongoing discipleship in the doctrine of the believer’s union with Christ through training adults, discipling future leaders in the youth, and providing

curriculum for children would stabilize and protect the church in the future. This project cannot solve all the implications of the members of KRBC union with Christ as it is expressed in community, but it can begin the process by laying important theological groundwork necessary for lasting change by starting with the adult members of the church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the members of Kennerly Road Baptist Church in Irmo, South Carolina, to understand their union with Christ as a basis for biblical community.

Goals

This project was measured according to three goals. The first and last goals intended to gauge the comprehension of the believer's union with Christ in relation to understanding biblical community. The middle goal was designed to develop and implement curriculum to increase KRBC members' understanding of these important and needed truths.

1. The first goal was to assess the current comprehension of the believer's union with Christ and its implications for biblical community among the members of Kennerly Road Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop and teach an eight-session seminar for adults on the believer's union with Christ.
3. The third goal was to increase the comprehension of the believer's union with Christ among the members of Kennerly Road Baptist Church.

A specific research methodology was developed to assess the successful completion of these three goals.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of three goals. The first goal was to assess the current comprehension of the believer's union with

Christ and its implications for biblical community among the members of Kennerly Road Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the Union with Christ Understanding and Application survey to the adult members of KRBC.⁵ The survey focused on both the theological understanding of the believer's union with Christ and how this understanding is specifically applied in living in a Christian community in the local church. The purpose of this goal was to provide a benchmark of the comprehension of the KRBC members prior to specific instruction detailed in this project. This goal was considered successfully met when 50 percent of the adult members completed the survey and the results had been compiled providing a clearer understanding of the understanding and application of these truths in their lives in relation to the theological truth of the believer's union with Christ.⁶

The second goal was to develop an eight-session seminar for adults on the believer's union with Christ. This curriculum included an emphasis on a theological understanding of union with Christ as foundational to understanding living in biblical community with one another. This goal was measured by an expert panel comprised of a panel of at least three ordained and experienced pastors from within and outside of KRBC. They utilized a rubric to assess the curriculum for biblical fidelity and practical relevance in application.⁷ This goal was successfully met when all three reviewers had assessed the material as biblically sound and practically relevant for a local church setting as demonstrated by each area of evaluation scoring at least satisfactory on the rubric. Any area that scored below satisfactory would be adjusted and then resubmitted to the expert panel until the score reached satisfactory level.

⁵ See appendix 1. All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁶ As of May 2023, there were thirty-six adult members of KRBC.

⁷ See table A2 in appendix 3.

The third goal was to increase the comprehension of the believer's union with Christ among the members of KRBC. This goal was measured by readministering the survey to those that had attended at least six sessions of the eight-session series. This post-test differed from the pre-test in asking participants to indicate that they attended the sessions and had completed the pre-test prior to the series. This goal was considered successfully met when two criteria were completed: first, when at least 80 percent of those that attended the eight-session series and completed the pre-survey had completed the post-survey, and second, when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-test survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Union with Christ. This doctrine describes the believer's experience of the life and work of Christ in their justification, sanctification, and resurrection.⁸ Louis Berkhof writes, "This union may be defined as that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation."⁹ *Union with Christ* is the connection between believers and God by which they receive all the blessings and empowering of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ from their conversion through eternity.

Biblical community. This term is understood through Jerry Bridges's helpful identification of *biblical community* as both a relationship and partnership that results in communion. Relationally, "Biblical community is first of all the sharing of a common life in Christ."¹⁰ The partnership of "biblical community then, incorporates this idea of an

⁸ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 5-8.

⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1938), 449.

¹⁰ Jerry Bridges, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 11.

active promotion of the gospel and the building up of believers.”¹¹ The result is communion among believers who share freely with one another, particularly “what God has taught them from the Scriptures, or it may be a word of encouragement from one believer to another. The key element is that the subject matter is focused on God as well as on His word and works.”¹²

Identity. This project understands *identity* as the deepest sense of self that reflects the objective reality of who God says they are. Identity is a complex concept that is debated over between social scientists and theologians. A significant conflict centers on identity’s subjective or objective nature. For social scientists like Erikson, identity is the sense of self that a person holds and how this relates to others.¹³ While it is to be discovered, there is a subjectiveness to their identity based in the individual’s comprehension of their reality. In this system, the individual becomes creator of their identity. Theologians would hold that there is a created by God, and therefore an objective reality, of identity. Identity is fixed objectively but can be increasingly known subjectively. Deepak Reju proposes mature identity as being that “which arises out of the interaction of the I-self with the me-self.”¹⁴ As a person embraces their created reality they are maturing in their identity. A person then is not defining their identity by their understanding but maturing in their understanding of who God made them. Specifically, the Christian’s deepest sense of self ought to be rooted in the understanding of the theological reality of one’s union with Christ. Grudem writes, “Union with Christ is a phrase used to summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ,

¹¹ Bridges, *True Community*, 13.

¹² Bridges, *True Community*, 14.

¹³ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Norton, 1980), 34.

¹⁴ Deepak Varghese Reju, “Toward a Definition of Christian Identity: Using the Interpretive Lens of Creation, Fall, and Redemption in Christian Counseling” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 146.

through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation. These relationships include the fact that we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ.”¹⁵

One limitation applied to this project. Since this seminar occurred during the morning worship time, some adult members were not physically able to be present due to ministry obligations, health concerns, and other unforeseen factors. To mitigate this limitation, each session was videoed, and participants were required to indicate on the survey post-test the number of sessions they attended in person or by video.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, to gauge the effectiveness of the seminar, only the post-test scores of those that had taken the pre-test and attended at least six of the sessions were included in the results. Second, since the purpose of the project was geared toward the members of KRBC, only members’ test results were considered for this study. This delimitation was applied by filtering the pre- and post-test surveys of non-members from those of members.

Conclusion

No greater theological reality impacts a believer’s identity than his union with Christ. This shared reality within the redeemed membership of a local church should be the driving truth of how the members of KRBC relate to one another. The following chapters will demonstrate why this core truth provides a framework for doing life together in a local church. Chapter 2 will show how the reality of a believer’s union with Christ is central to his identity and how it touches every relationship in the church.

¹⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 841.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE IMPACT OF UNION WITH CHRIST ON THE PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

This chapter provides a biblical and theological basis for how union with Christ is central to the identity of the believer and how this doctrine is a primary source for informing how the believer is to do community. This chapter will discuss the concept of union with Christ, a brief overview of its use in Romans 1–11, and an exegetical study of Romans 12.

The concept of a believer's union with Christ is one of the most significant doctrines and should be widely understood and appropriated in the life of every believer. It is at the very core of the believer's salvation.¹ Union with Christ is nothing less than the connection between the believer and the person of Christ. It connects the salvation of a person with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Lane Tipton writes, "Union with Christ is a soteric replication of the structure of the believer's life experience of what happened antecedently in the life experience of Christ, namely death and resurrection."² For believers, it is a theological reality but not always a known functional reality.³ While union with Christ certainly depicts salvation so that either a person is "in Christ" or not, either one is justified or not, regenerated or not, and so on, union with Christ carries a

¹ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 3.

² Lane G. Tipton, "Union with Christ and Justification," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. Scott K. Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 25.

³ Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 2.

relational emphasis of the glorious change that occurs when a person is redeemed.⁴ Union with Christ extends beyond the believer's justification to their sanctification. Wayne Grudem explains,

When Christ died and rose from the dead, we died and rose with him, and so our status and existence was dramatically changed. Since, following Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent to bring us to spiritual life and indwell and renew us, our participation in Christ's death and resurrection is vitally dynamic and transformative.⁵

When the believer connects their sanctification to their union with Christ it will assist in understanding and then demonstrating their new daily existence. Tipton writes, "It is resurrection life in Christ—the very resurrection life of Christ—believers possess in union with Christ. Therefore, replication of the resurrection life of Christ in believers occurs by means of union with Christ."⁶ Additionally, union with Christ should be understood as the joining of every believer with Christ in resurrection. The intimate relationship between every believer and God is put on full display in the resurrection of Christ and its connection to the future resurrection of every believer. Robert Letham says, "The two resurrections are identical in theological terms as well as identical in the outcome they produce. This is so since we have been granted to share the same relation to the Father as the Son enjoys, since we are in union with him, and since God treats us exactly like the Son!"⁷ From justification, to sanctification, to resurrection, the believer is united to Christ.

The members of KRBC need to be instructed in the doctrine of union with Christ with all its blessings and its practical implications for their daily lives. The believer's union with Christ is not limited to his personal relationship to God. It has grave

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 840.

⁵ Letham, *Union with Christ*, 85.

⁶ Tipton, "Union with Christ and Justification," 27.

⁷ Letham, *Union with Christ*, 136.

implications for the entire life of all believers, including how they are to operate in community with one another.

Overview of Union with Christ in the New Testament

There is a vast amount of biblical material concerning union with Christ. The truth of the doctrine has massive implications for every area of the Christian life.⁸ The apostles Paul and John are the dominant voices that speak to union with Christ along with Peter who makes mention of this doctrine as well. The most comprehensive treatment of the doctrine is found in Pauline writings. Constantine Campbell states,

To do full justice to the full spectrum of Paul's thought and language, the terms *union, participation, identification, incorporation* are adopted, in place of previous terminology. These four umbrella terms successfully capture the full range of prepositional phraseology, metaphorical conceptualizations, and theological interactions that Paul draws on to communicate what it means to be united to Christ.⁹

The most common phrasing used for this doctrine is *in Christ*. Hans Burger writes, "The apostles Paul and John are the most important sources for in Christ-language."¹⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer adds, "Paul uses the phrase 'in Christ' (*en Cristw*) seventy-three times. When we add other ways of expressing union with or participation in Christ (e.g., 'in him,' 'with Christ,' 'through Christ') the number of Pauline instances more than doubles, to 164 instances."¹¹ However, these phrases are not exclusive to Paul.

John is the other dominant apostolic voice using *in Christ* language. The apostle John makes it clear in John 6:51-58 that the believer is in communion with the crucified

⁸ Burger, *Being in Christ*, 2.

⁹ Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 29, emphasis original.

¹⁰ Burger, *Being in Christ*, 158.

¹¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From 'Blessed in Christ' to 'Being in Christ,'" in *In Christ in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018), 13-14.

Christ. Believers are in the death of Christ because they are in Him and He is in them.¹² Paul teaches extensively in Romans 6 on this concept of the believer's participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. John illustrates the reality of the believer being in Christ and Christ in the believer in his account of the sermon on the vine and the branches in John 15. Campbell notes, "The image of the vine and the branches parallels the body and its members—both metaphors are organic, envisaging a profound connection to Christ."¹³ While not as extensive as Paul and John, Peter uses the same language of being *in Christ* to communicate the guideline for the believer's behavior (1 Pet 3:16), glory that awaits the believer (1 Pet 5:10), and the righteous affection for other believers (1 Pet 5:14). The author of Hebrews says those that are *in Christ* is the difference between the saved and the lost (3:14). John uses this language to signal his identity as the servant of Christ (Rev 1:9). Union with Christ is a comprehensive term used as the identity of Christians in how they relate to God, self, and others.

Union with Christ functionally informs how believers live out their new standing before God. Believers are called to love God and others as a defining attribute of their lives (Mark 12:30-31; 1 John 4:7-12). This love for God and others is not natural because of humanity's sinful condition. Union with Christ enables this newfound disposition. It is used to describe the impetus and ability for change in the life of the believer. Grant Macaskill writes, "This means that we can never talk about the moral activity of a Christian without always, in the same breath, talking about Jesus, because the goal of our salvation is not that we become morally better versions of ourselves but that we come to inhabit and to manifest his moral identity."¹⁴ Union with Christ is the participation of the believer with the redemptive work of Christ in His life, death, and resurrection. It is so

¹² Burger, *Being in Christ*, 289.

¹³ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 419.

¹⁴ Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 1.

ingrained in the new reality of the believer that Paul declares that the life he lives now is not his own but Christ in him coming out of him (Gal 2:20). Union with Christ encompasses the enabling transformation of selfish sinners to loving saints.

Union with Christ is a matter of the identity of the believer.¹⁵ Awareness of this doctrine frames his consciousness, and how he thinks about who he is will invariably impact how he relates to others. The concern of this project is the specific application of the doctrine with its impact on the horizontal relationships of the believer. Union with Christ is the positional reality for every believer. However, comprehension of this reality also plays a role in changing the way Christians think about and manage their relationships with others in the church. The truth of union with Christ must be understood for the best expressions of this new identity to be realized in a believer's life. While Paul is the most comprehensive author to deal with union with Christ, one chapter serves to highlight the impact of the doctrine on inter-church relationships. Romans 12 will afford the opportunity to wrestle with the greater implications of union with Christ in the life of the church and prove the necessity of the doctrine within the community.

Summary of Union with Christ in Romans 1–11

Pauline literature is distinctive for its pattern of extended doctrinal instruction followed by the practical application of that doctrine. While this broader perspective of Paul's approach is helpful, it is not to say that his openings have little application or that his application has little doctrine. Instead, seeing Pauline writing as largely doctrine preceding application helpfully leads believers to a perspective that they are living out a new reality as opposed to bringing a reality into being by obedience.¹⁶ The result is a

¹⁵ See Todd J. Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 2, Kindle.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 431.

significant amount of doctrinal information on union with Christ prior to the applications of chapter 12.

Of particular emphasis in Romans are the blessings the believer has experienced through Christ. Those things received through Christ exist under the broader umbrella of the believer's union with Christ.¹⁷ The very beginning of the instrumental role of Christ in the life of the believer is declared in autobiographical terms by Paul. He understands himself as having received grace and apostleship through Christ (Rom 1:3-5). Paul sees these gifts as from God but mediated by Christ.¹⁸ Paul's perspective of God's gifting in his life is sourced in his understanding of his conversion and call to apostleship.¹⁹ While the personal testimony of Paul about his call to apostleship is unique, the grace that brought it into his life is not. The grace Paul experienced in his conversion and calling is the same grace for every believer as the gift of God (1 Cor 1:4). Paul saw all his life through the lens of being in Christ so that it informs all his decisions and his instructions for Roman believers.

Romans lays out a series of blessings enjoyed by believers through Christ. First and most important among them is justification. There is debate over whether Romans 3:22-24 is subjective or objective regarding faith. Galatians 2:18-20 is much clearer in demonstrating Paul's thoughts here. F. F. Bruce writes, "Having died with Christ in his death, the believer now lives with Christ in his life—i.e., his resurrection life. In fact, this

¹⁷ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 237.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 55.

¹⁹ Colin Kruse writes,

Speaking of this event in Galatians 1:15-16, he says: "God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Paul's apostleship came "through" Christ, but ultimately it came from God. It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul often speaks of himself as "an apostle of Christ by the will of God" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1) or "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God" (1 Tim. 1:1), and that he says he is 'an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father (Gal. 1:1). (Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 49)

new life in Christ is nothing less than the risen Christ living his life in the believer.”²⁰ Whether the language of Romans 3:22-24 is objective or subjective, the result is the same: justification for the believer is through the person of Christ.²¹ Justification is achieved through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. This imputation must not be understood apart from union with Christ.²² Second, the believer experiences the blessing of peace with God having been rescued from wrath through Christ (Rom 5:1, 9). Third, the believer has now been reconciled to God (Rom 5:11). Those who were formally enemies have now been made friends. Fourth, and critical to understanding union with Christ, is that believers are now in Christ like how they were formally in Adam (Rom 5:12-21). Thomas Schreiner explains,

Those in Adam are condemned and dead, but those in Christ are righteous and reign in life (Rom 5:17). Adam’s sin made many sinners, but Christ’s obedience made many righteous (Rom 5:19). The two decisive figures in human history are Adam and Christ. Adam brought into the world the great enemies of human happiness—sin and death. These twin powers reign over all those in Adam, and only those in Christ conquer sin and death and become righteous and live.²³

Fourth, through Christ the believer has been incorporated into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 6:1-11) with emphasis on the impact of being in Christ in His

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 144.

²¹ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 252.

²² D. A. Carson states,

On the one hand, justification is, in Paul, irrefragably tied to our incorporation into Christ, to our union with Christ. Thus, as we have seen, in Philippians 3:8-9 Paul wants to be found *in him*, not having a *righteousness* of his own. In 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, we are told that God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that *in him* we might become the *righteousness* of God. It is because of God that we are *in Christ Jesus*, who has become for us *righteousness* (and other things: 1 Cor 1:30). Passage after passage in Paul runs down the same track. If we speak of justification or of imputation (whether of our sins to Christ or of dikaiosune/nh being credited to us) *apart* from a grasp of this incorporation into Christ, we will constantly be in danger of contemplating some sort of transfer *apart* from being included in Christ, *apart* from union with Christ. (D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbans and Daniel J. Treier [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 72)

²³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 159.

death being utilized in Rom 7:4. Fifth, the believer is freed from condemnation through Christ (Rom 8:1-11). Sixth, adoption by the Father is accomplished as a blessing through union with Christ (Rom 9:1-8).

All these blessings are derived by union with Christ and form the basis for the Roman church to hear the instruction of Paul that concerns this project. Hearts prepared by this lengthy series of blessings are best prepared to hear how they should live out this new reality in community. Union with Christ is not Paul's primary focus. Rather, it is the context of understanding his focus of the life of the believer on the glory of God. Union with Christ is the universe where the life of the believer orbits around God's glory.

Campbell writes,

Thus, I argue that union with Christ is not Paul's "great concern," nor is it the centre of his theological framework. It is, rather, the essential ingredient that binds all other elements together; it is the webbing that connects the ideas of Paul's web-shaped theological framework. It is for this reason that we can say that every blessing we receive from God is through our union with Christ. It is by being united to him in faith by the Spirit, dying, suffering, rising, and glorying with him, having been predestined and redeemed in him, being identified with his realm, and being incorporated into his people that Believers enjoy the manifold grace of God.²⁴

Having established the groundwork of union with Christ in Romans, attention now turns to the specific commands given to believers as expressions of their identity in Christ.

Union with Christ Applied to the Christian Community in Romans 12

Romans 12:1-3: Transformational Thinking of Those "in Christ"

With all these blessings received through Christ because of now being in Christ, how should believers see their life and govern their behavior? The believer can observe the answer in three key areas in the opening verses of chapter 12. The mindset and therefore

²⁴ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 442.

actions for the person in Christ must be sacrificial, transformational, and volitional in relation to others.

Paul holds out a powerful image of sacrifice to guide their thought process. Mark A. Seifrid writes, “This sacrifice is not the surrender to God of that which by rights is ours; rather, it is the yielding of the whole of our bodily life in thanksgiving to our Creator, who not only has made us and formed us but also has given himself for us and to us in Christ.”²⁵ Sacrifice is a weighted term that calls forward images of costliness, blood, smoke, and worship. It certainly points to the work of the cross to which the entire Old Testament pointed.

This sacrifice language calls the believer to introspection that leads to a decidedly different way of living. Seifrid notes,

The basis and spring of sanctification is union with Christ, more especially union with him in the virtue of his death and the power of his resurrection (*cf.* 6:2-6; 7:4-6). It is by this union with Christ that the breach with sin in its power and defilement was effected (*cf.* 6:14) and newness of life in the efficacy of Jesus’ resurrection inaugurated (*cf.* 6:4, 10, 11).²⁶

This language is rooted in Old Testament ideas of sacrifice and worship. Moo explains,

Paul’s use of sacrificial imagery fits a pattern found throughout the NT. Christians no longer offer literal sacrifices, for Christ has fulfilled and thus brought to an end the OT sacrificial system. But the centrality of sacrifice in ancient religion made it a natural and inevitable vehicle for the early Christians to express their own religious convictions.²⁷

There is a costliness to laying aside a former way of thinking, a sacrifice, and doing that now marks the believer as a true follower of Christ. This cost, though, is always set against the greater worth of the object of worship for the Christian.

²⁵ Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 680.

²⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:109-10.

²⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 769.

Sacrifice is about value and worth. It is giving up something precious as a demonstration of the greater value in the worship of God. Understanding this in relation to believers' lives is what Paul is attempting to lead them to understand. Approaching life as a sacrifice toward Christ is seen on a few occasions in the Gospels. The rebuke of Christ toward Martha for not understanding the better thing of being with Him demonstrates a greater worth in Christ than even service (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus capitalizes on this theme of worth and sacrifice in His parables of the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great price (Matt 13:44-46), so He is worth far more than any treasure here. A stunning image of sacrificial worship is on display in the account of the woman washing the feet of Jesus in Simon's home (Mark 14:3-9). The honest evaluation of this mysterious woman attesting to the worth of Jesus is shocking to everyone in attendance except for Jesus. James Edwards writes, "The unnamed woman deems Jesus worthy of her sacrifice, whereas the disciples do not. 'They rebuked her harshly.' The Greek word behind this phrase, *embrimaesthai*, is unusually vehement, meaning 'to flare the nostrils [in anger].'"²⁸ Their anger reveals their failure to understand true value in a spiritual sense. Paul is calling believers to approach the spending of their life as a valuable resource for the greater worth of Jesus. The question of their minds must no longer be what serves them but what God would call them to do in every situation. The guiding thought must be one of sacrifice that images the sacrifice of Christ out of a heart of gratitude. It is a practical way of understanding the central gospel concept of taking up their cross and following Christ (Matt 16:24-26).

The outworking of this sacrificial ethos for the believer is the transformation of the mind. What believers think is of central concern for Paul before he addresses what they do. The basis for this working in the life of the believer through the Spirit because of union with Christ is found in Romans 8. In Romans 8, Paul emphasized a process of

²⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 415.

knowledge, understanding, and submission within the mind of the believer. This work of the Spirit in the life of the believer is what works to produce life and holiness (Rom 8:5-8). Here in Romans 12:1-3, the believer is called to this ongoing process of transformational thinking. Susan Eastman writes,

Thus Paul limns the first evidence of the Spirit working in and with human beings; a transformed mindset, incorporating motifs of perception, discernment and judgment that lead to peace among believers. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul amplifies this motif through the promise of transformation through the renewal of the mind, which in turn “proves, tests, and judges” in accordance with the will of God.²⁹

This working of the Spirit is part and parcel of union with Christ. It is precisely because the believer is now *in Christ* that they have the indwelling person and power of the Spirit.³⁰ The direction of this sacrificial ethos is to discover how God would have the believer act. In this process of willingly laying aside their own way of thinking, in a manner that will feel very costly, they are living out the reality of being *in Christ*, who sought not His own will but that of His Father (John 6:38).

Having established the sacrificial and transformational work in the mind of the believer, Paul turns to the volitional outworking of this reality. Romans 12 declares that there must be a change of not just how believers think but what they do in their relationships with one another. Eastman says, “Grounded in deliverance from condemnation, the new mindset issues in non-condemning attitudes toward others (8:1; 12:3). Grounded in the love of God poured out, it issues in genuine love not only towards God but towards one another (12:9; 13:8-10).”³¹ The way believers relate to one another becomes primary evidence for the reality of the presence of the Spirit in them. As Moo writes, “Thus he wants us to recognize that the transformation of character is seen

²⁹ Susan G. Eastman, “Oneself in Another,” in Thate, Vanhoozer, and Campbell, *In Christ in Paul*, 120.

³⁰ Eastman, “Oneself in Another,” 123.

³¹ Eastman, “Oneself in Another,” 123-24.

especially in our relationships with one another.”³² Having just told the Romans to think in a sacrificially transformed way he now tells them with specificity of how to think of themselves in relation to each other. The operative word that should guide the thinking of the believer in community is *grace*. Paul has already established that apostleship (Rom 1:5), justification (Rom 3:24), faith (Rom 4:16), Christ, and the law of life for the believer (Rom 6:14-15) is all by grace. He uses that humble mindset of grace applied to himself first to then call believers to view themselves as recipients also of grace as well as others around them. He unpacks this more with an illustration of the body of Christ and instruction on spiritual gifts (Rom 12:4-7). Both serve as reminders that, for Paul, the new reality of believers is that life is not them but Christ in them (Gal 2:20).

The sacrificially transforming mindset of the believer is the natural result of now being *in Christ*. The evidence of this reality is borne out in a new perspective of self and other believers that will invariably lead to a change in relational behavior. Romans 12:1-3 prepares the believers of KRBC to live in the reality that in their salvation they have embarked on a life-long journey of gradually moving away from a proud mindset of self. The power for this is in the Spirit because of them now being in Christ and doing life with others that are also in Christ. A principal question must be, what is the will of God in how I functionally do life in this church? With a question so broad, there is a desperate need for detailed instruction. The rest of Romans 12 helps to provide categories to gain a greater grasp on the practical outworking of this new disposition of thinking and behavior and the need of this project.

Romans 12:4-5: The Body of Christ

The illustration of the body of Christ brings into focus two distinct points of truth. First, a unique unity is to exist in the Christian community. The unity is likened to the function of a physical body. In verses 4 and 5 Paul emphasizes the “oneness” of this

³² Moo, *Romans*, 777-78.

body. Second, there are individual roles for every member of the body. Physically this is obvious and is stressed in the sister passage to this text in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. This unity amidst diversity will be expressed in Romans 12 through the varied spiritual gifts distributed within the church by the Holy Spirit. The physical body becomes a living illustration of this new society in Christ in its separate and yet unified parts.³³

The imagery of being one body is at once both easily understood and deeply strange when applied to a community of people in how it is presented in Scripture. It stands as very different from how Paul's culture thought of a community as being a body, an illustration that was not uncommon to them.³⁴ To say that the church is the body of Christ is more than just a collection of people in some business or political sense of a body of decision makers. It is an emphasis of both unity and diversity and of interconnectedness and independence. The physical body seems to work seamlessly between mind, emotion, and action. In fact, diseases and deformities that break down the ability of the body to work in a unified fashion are understood as anomalies to be cured since they oppose the norm. Cancer is the body working against itself, Legionnaire's disease destroys the ability of the body to communicate properly within itself, and Alzheimer's is a physical condition that destroys the mental function of the brain. A healthy body works naturally in union. Applying that idea to a group of people with radically different personalities, cultural experiences, ideas, drives, gifts, and history seems impossible. The reality of this difficulty is expressed in multiple epistles dealing with the lack of unity in local assemblies. The various divisions of slaves and masters, gender, economic standing, and ethnicity all stand at odds with the idea of being "one body." An overly simplistic reading of the text dealing with these divisions would seem to be a call to be better at being

³³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 458.

³⁴ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 170.

unified. The closest expression of this idea of working harder to maintain unity is Ephesians 4:1-3 with its call to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.” However, Paul presses on to base this call to action as sourced in the theological reality of being now one body *in Christ*. It is not as much a work to do as a reality to express. Macaskill writes, “The oneness of the body is not something that we work to achieve by the quality of our fellowship but something that we work to manifest in our realization of the singular identity (Jesus) who unites us.”³⁵ Physician turned theologian D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones contrasts the unity of a train made up of individual cars and yet one train with the reality of the body of Christ. It is not the same idea and unhelpful to think of the church as many parts functioning together: “In the body, you have a vital relationship, an organic unity, which means that there is a living connection between the parts. It is not a kind of soldering or trying on but an inner unity, as Paul suggests in such a wonderful way in Ephesians 4:16.”³⁶ The local church as an expression of the body of Christ is a key application of the reality of a community of people, all of whom are *in Christ*; they are one body, the body of Christ.

The necessity of understanding Paul’s idea of the body as an image of unity and intent behind the metaphor becomes a significant factor in helping KRBC work out the practical ramifications of each member’s union with Christ. The central concept of the body is unity with diversity of function. The wording Paul uses makes it clear that his emphasis is on the unity over the diversity. Schreiner explains,

Paul emphasizes that the human body is characterized by both unity and diversity. By definition the human body has “many members.” and the various members have distinct functions. We expect Paul to say in verse 5 that the body of Christ corresponds to the human body; it is one but marked by diversity in function. The diversity in the body is doubtless implied given the wording of verse 4. But Paul

³⁵ Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, 69.

³⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 12: Christian Conduct* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 171.

surprises the reader by emphasizing unity rather than the diversity of the body of Christ.³⁷

Prior to a conversation about diversity of function within the church there must be held at the forefront the idea of unity because they are all now *in Christ*.³⁸ The members of KRBC work together, worship together, serve together, and do life together because they are all in the body of Christ as an expression of their union with Christ.

Paul presses the point of unity and its relational expression by citing that they are not just members of the body of Christ but also “members one of another.” In stark contrast to the Western society norm, spirituality for the Christian is not an individualistic effort. Robert Mounce explains, “Although each member has come to faith by a separate and individual act of faith, the believing community lives out its Christian experience in fellowship with one another. John Donne’s ‘no man is an island’ is true of the church of Jesus Christ. ‘Lone Ranger Christianity’ is a contradiction in terms.”³⁹ In Ephesians 4:25 Paul uses this same phrasing to condemn lying within the church. Lying is the first sin judged in the church with the condemnation and immediate punishment of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. This significant sin could have been condemned on the grounds of that couple’s failure. Paul could have likewise appealed to the nature of Satan as being the father of lies (John 8:44). He could have directed their hearts to Christ being “truth” (John 14:6) and so they must also be truth speakers. Instead, he directs the Ephesians to consider lying’s impact on the community since they are so interconnected. John Chrysostom helpfully illustrates the disastrous effects of one member of the body like the eye lying to the foot about its direction or what is ahead.⁴⁰ For one member of the body to

³⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 654.

³⁸ Morris, *Romans*, 439.

³⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 234.

⁴⁰ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1887), 396.

mislead another is only to invite destruction to the self. When Paul appeals to the Romans about being members one of another, he is calling them to consider the impact on others and themselves if they do not have a transformed mindset about a new corporate identity as the result of their union in Christ. This corporate mentality, though, is not as an organization but as an organism. Harold Hoehner helpfully follows Paul's use of the phrase "members one of the another." "The concept of a close relationship is enhanced by the use of the reciprocal pronoun 'one another.' In order for this body to function smoothly and efficiently, truth must be expressed among the members."⁴¹ Clearly for Paul, the concept of being members one of another brings out the potential for great harm or blessing to the organism, the body of Christ, by each member. Believers are unified relationally because of their union with Christ.

The idea of damage or health happening to the body of Christ is a fruit of the unity that exists through every believer's union with Christ. It is a call to a new responsibility to others in the church. To live in the reality of every believer's sin or righteousness impacting on a deep and personal way others that he is in community with should motivate an intentionality in service, discipleship, and worship. Union with Christ is foundational to this understanding of being in the body of Christ, and being in the body of Christ is foundational to seeing the implications and application of union with Christ in community. Building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:10-16) through offices and gifts given to the church by Christ is the natural progression that follows the imagery of the body. If sins like lying do grave damage, then how can health and maturity be brought? For the Romans, Paul turns to spiritual giftedness. God has granted gifts for the good of the body. KRBC needs to know how to best serve one another in this body as an expression of unity, which can be seen in understanding and using their spiritual gifts.

⁴¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 618.

Romans 12:6a: Spiritual Gifts as Expressions of Grace

Healthy diversity in the local church celebrates unity in Christ while working out the differences that Christ has woven into the fabric of the church. Spiritual gifts are expressions of each believer's union with Christ. Spiritual gifts are Christ in the believer, coming out of the believer. A diversity of giftedness creates a mosaic that puts Christ on display in a multi-faceted way. Before believers "do" ministry, it is helpful for them to understand that they, in spiritual gifts as an expression of their union with Christ, are showcasing Christ. Using spiritual gifts is an outworking of their identity before it is a responsibility to fulfill. All believers are in the body of Christ through their union with Christ, but differences of function within the body should be understood and celebrated.

Turning to the varieties of function in the community, there is the diversity of spiritual gifts in the community.⁴² In addition to the discussion in Romans 12:6-8, the existence of spiritual gifts in the life of the church is taught by Paul (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11) and referenced by Peter (1 Pet 4:10-11). Among these passages, the number of gifts is disputed among commentators. Questions concerning the actual number, or the operation or non-operation of certain gifts, is beyond the scope of this project or the use of spiritual gifts here in Romans 12. Paul's purpose is not to provide comprehensive instruction on categories of gifts or their use as he does in 1 Corinthians. Instead, he provides examples of gifts that range from divine communication to practical acts of ministry. His limiting this list to seven gifts out of the possible nineteen gifts, when other texts are considered, points to Paul's lack of intention to speak

⁴² On four occasions in the last five years there has been instruction on spiritual gifts at KRBC. Two of these were the result of Sunday morning sermons series that worked through Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12. A separate Sunday evening lecture series involved a deeper look into spiritual gifts from a broader approach. A Sunday school series that used some of the material from the previous sermon series was the foundation of this material and presented in the fall of 2021. As a result of this amount of instruction, the membership has a good grasp on the number, nature, and identification of spiritual gifts. To further understand the grasp of spiritual gifts, statements on the pre- and post-lectures series surveys explores their understanding and application of spiritual gifts.

comprehensively about spiritual gifts here in Romans.⁴³ What is key is that there is a diversity of the gifts so a diversity of function in the body of Christ. This diversity puts each believer's union with Christ on display.

The means of receiving spiritual gifts in the believer is by God's grace (Rom 12:6). These gifts of grace bring a heavy responsibility for appropriate usage. Paul's phrasing here immediately recalls his own understanding of his salvation and call to apostolic ministry (Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 15:9-10; Gal 1:15). The gift of salvation, the call of the apostle, and the distribution of spiritual gifts are all in the mind of God alone. None of them are thought of as earned by the recipient. Specifically in relation to spiritual gifts, God's sovereign role in their choosing and distribution to believers is the consistent pattern of Paul's instruction. In Ephesians 4:7-8 Christ is the distributor of gifts following His ascension. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 the gifts are manifestations of the Spirit given to each believer. Here in Romans 12 the gifts are "according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." This Trinitarian formula only helps in maintaining the mindset of diversity of function within unity. The apostle clearly functions with a Trinitarian concept of God.⁴⁴ That these gifts are from grace presses home the point that they are not for self but for others.⁴⁵ Paul's next phrase in Romans 12:6 is the automatic next step. If these are truly gifts of God intended to put Christ on display and to bless the body of Christ, then the believer needs to use them. God gives the gifts, empowers their use, and defines how to use them, but calls the believer to obediently put them to good use.⁴⁶

⁴³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 655.

⁴⁴ Kruse, *Romans*, 470.

⁴⁵ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 23.

⁴⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 783.

Romans 12:6b-8: Individual Spiritual Gifts

Seven gifts are listed by Paul here in Romans. As has been noted, this is not a comprehensive listing but a representative listing intending to demonstrate diversity.⁴⁷ Moo explains, “The diversity of gifts is underscored by the word (*diaphora*, different).”⁴⁸ The gifts themselves are an extension of the believer now being in Christ. The believer is instructed to think differently (Rom 12:3) as a result of their union with Christ and the operation of these gifts, as Douglas Campbell explains, “are all different measures of Christian believing.”⁴⁹ The presence of the gifts is indicative of the presence of the grace of God and the believer’s new identity in Christ. The use of the varied gifts is an outworking of realizing a new mindset, which is the result of this new identity in Christ.

Prophecy is the first gift listed and is not without controversy as to its meaning or understanding considering the injunction to “prophesy in proportion to their faith.” Calvin and Mounce see the gift of prophecy in Romans 12 as being the same as modern day preaching.⁵⁰ It is a bold proclamation of God’s Word or what might be called a forthtelling of truth. Morris and Murray hold prophecy as being identical in many ways, if not degree, to the Old Testament prophets with an emphasis on foretelling the future.⁵¹ Moo and Schreiner hold that prophecy could include foretelling of the future but in the New Testament the emphasis is on forthtelling.⁵² Grudem and Carson claim the gift as including special revelation, foretelling, but different in authority from Old Testament

⁴⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 655.

⁴⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 655.

⁴⁹ Douglas A. Campbell, “Participation and Faith in Paul,” in Thate, Vanhoozer, and Campbell, *In Christ in Paul*, 44.

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Romans*, 460; Mounce, *Romans*, 234.

⁵¹ Morris, *Romans*, 440; Murray, *Romans*, 2:122.

⁵² Moo, *Romans*, 783; Schreiner, *Romans*, 655.

prophets.⁵³ Grudem and Carson’s view maintains the integrity of the canon if the gift persists today while analogizing it to the Old Testament understanding of prophecy. Their view also attempts to bring to bear what Paul might mean by using the gift “in proportion to our faith.” Schreiner⁵⁴ helpfully defines the two dominant views on understanding this unique phrase with the first being that of Grudem and Carson and the second with Calvin⁵⁵ and Mounce⁵⁶ of prophecy being exercised in accordance with the faith set forth by the apostles. The second view is that prophecy is much closer to Paul’s instruction on the measure of faith that each believer has from Romans 12:3. Schreiner writes, “Prophets might be tempted to prophesy beyond the faith given by God, perhaps to impress others with their charismatic ability. They are exhorted therefore, to prophesy in accordance with the faith that has been given to them.”⁵⁷ Moo and Murray support this view as well.⁵⁸ What can be said with certainty is that there is the possibility to use the gift of prophecy in a wrong manner or a correct manner. The guards on the gift of prophecy are that it is to be used in the measure of faith and to be used in love (1 Cor 13:1-3). The real danger was for the gift to be used in a way that went beyond its design and that design is clear in Romans 12. The gifts are for unified expressions of being in one body. If the use of a gift exceeded a humble perspective (Rom 12:3) of the believer’s role in the church as an expression of union with Christ, then it would bring damage instead of edification (1 Cor 13:1-3), tear apart the body instead of build it up (Eph 4:12, 15-16, 29), and destroy the image of being Christ’s body as a result of union with Christ. Whether the gift is

⁵³ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 58-59; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 95.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 656.

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Romans*, 460.

⁵⁶ Mounce, *Romans*, 234.

⁵⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 656.

⁵⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 765-66; Murray, *Romans*, 2:123.

presently active in this age or not, its warnings of misuse are sobering. Words spoken in ministry at KRBC must accord with faith, love, and unity, even if accompanied with the maxim “thus sayeth the Lord.”

The next three gifts can be grouped together by virtue of both their introductory article and the guidelines given for their usage.⁵⁹ This grouping is not a blending but an understanding that Paul exhorts each to be done with focus and determination for the use of the gift. So, if one is gifted to serve then serve, if teaching then teach, and if exhorting then exhort. The emphasis is that the one with this gift should “give themselves”⁶⁰ wholeheartedly to the ministry. Moo states, “Perhaps Paul is also concerned that those who have a certain gift might seek to minister in areas outside their sphere of giftedness and so neglect the gift that they have been given.”⁶¹ Once again the believer is confronted with the idea of a humble “stay in your lane” kind of mindset in the church. Against any negative connotation at this point, there is the transformational work of the mind because of being in Christ. This transformational mindset calls each believer to be excited to play their role in the body of Christ and experience the ministry of Christ through others with their different roles. This application of union with Christ through varied gifts and intentional use should bring greater unity through gratitude for God’s wise plan and His ministry in and to the believers at KRBC.

The last three gifts can be grouped due to the descriptions given for them. Where the first gift was given a guideline to restrict its use and the next three gifts called users to focus on their use, these three gifts provide encouragements for how to use them.⁶² Perhaps the instruction here addresses the potential discouragements that can accompany these

⁵⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 656-57.

⁶⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 2:124.

⁶¹ Moo, *Romans*, 785.

⁶² Schreiner, *Romans*, 658.

gifts; a weariness in their use (Gal 6:6-10). So, for the generous person it can become a feeling of demand, for the leader a weariness in decision making, and for the merciful a dread of always being around injustice and hurt. Each of these gifts are uniquely confronted with helping to bear the burdens of others for resources, direction, or practical ministry service. Each can be done in the flesh or out of a heart of love for God and others. It is helpful for the believer to see these gifts expressly tied to the example of Christ and out of a heart to serve Him. When Paul exhorted the Corinthians to give out of joy, he commends the Macedonians who had first given of themselves to the Lord (2 Cor 8:5). KRBC members should be led to see the use of the gift of giving as an expression of Christ's generosity to them and their expressing Him to others. Those with the gift of leadership should be taken back to the example of Christ in His leadership and His call to view it as stewardship and service (Matt 23:11). The one who is gifted in mercy should be led to see the endurance of Jesus in ministry in the face of weariness (John 4). Each of these gifts can be used to showcase believers' union with Christ as they operate within the body of Christ.

Romans 12:9-11: The Believer's Behavior Governed by Love

The next section in Romans 12 overflows with commands that unpack the ethical behaviors of the person now "in Christ." In verses 9-13 are thirteen separate commands with another five in verses 15-16. It is argued that all the commands flow out of the first command to "let love be genuine."⁶³ At minimum, the believer can concur that love is the foundational principal that governs the life of the believer (Matt 22:26-30; 1 Cor 13:13; Col 3:14) which probably explains its primacy as the first command listed here. This concise series of commands are basics of Christian operation in the community of the church. They are a skeleton, without a great deal of explanation, of what it looks

⁶³ Mounce, *Romans*, 236.

like for a believer to operate relationally out of a transformed mindset set forth in Romans 12:3. The additional fact that Paul had not been to Rome at this point in his missionary endeavors reinforces the ideas that he would presume these as necessary guidelines for any Christian community. The commands are then practical behaviors for the person who is *in Christ* relating to others who are *in Christ*, regardless of location, culture, or era. For this project, Romans 12:9-11 is a foundational text for KRBC to realize the impact of believers' union with Christ on their decisions and behaviors in community. It does not matter that the church is in the buckle of the Bible belt or has existed for thirty years, these commands are for every believer in every place at every time.

Romans 12:9 contains three different commands for the believer, but when taken as references to two separate Old Testament texts, the three commands combine into a forceful overarching directive to govern relationships. It has already been noted that Christ elevates love over other commands. Love is also at the very heart of the gospel (John 3:16) and the cross work of Christ is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for humanity (Rom 5:6-8). God is even identified as love personified (1 John 4:8). The impact on the believer's actions to be ruled by love is an outflow of the presence and work of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Most importantly, for this project, to be ruled by love is an expression of the believer's union with Christ (John 15:9-10; 1 John 4:7-8).⁶⁴ Macaskill writes,

The transformation of our lives through the presence of Christ must manifest itself in the practices of love. He is love, and it is Love that now inhabits us and that we, in turn, inhabit. Our rendering of new obedience to God is a manifestation of the Son's love for the Father but also of the Father's love for the Son and for those to whom the Son is united.⁶⁵

The love of believers then is a responsive and imitating love (1 John 4:16-21), but also a love that is in Christ and thus in them. Expressing that love is given two outlets in Romans

⁶⁴ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 33-34.

⁶⁵ Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, 139.

12:9 through two Old Testament references. First, Psalm 97:10 proclaims the hatred of evil by God and for the believer “to love God is to regard evil with horror.”⁶⁶ Clearly, part of the transforming mindset of the believer now in union with Christ is an increasing recognition and hatred of that which is evil. Second, Amos 5:14-15 calls the covenant community to embrace justice and righteousness over evil. Importantly, to “abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” is an expression that calls a person to match words with righteous behavior. The lies Israel tells themselves about following God while not enacting justice were hypocritical.⁶⁷ For Paul to appeal to this text carries additional weight for the person who is *in Christ*. The believer must be intentional in pursuing outward behavior that matches this new internal reality of union with Christ.

Romans 12:10-11 contains the next five commands that govern the behavior of believers within the Christian community as outworkings of their transforming mindset and expressions of their union with Christ. This series of commands opens with two compound Greek words. One, translated “brotherly love,” carries the idea of the familial affection that should exist among believers belonging to the family of God. This expression was unusual for the culture and unique among the church.⁶⁸ The other compound word is translated as “be devoted” (NASB), but comes from the same stem (*πηιλο*) as brotherly love. It likewise emphasizes the family relationships that are to exist among Christians.⁶⁹ The immediate expression of this kind of love is to seek the best for one another instead of one’s own desires. It calls to mind Paul’s exhortation in Philippians 2:3 “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than

⁶⁶ Mounce, *Romans*, 237.

⁶⁷ Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, New American Commentary, vol. 19B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 106.

⁶⁸ Morris, *Romans*, 444.

⁶⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 795.

yourselves.” Failure to obey this command of others prioritization divides a community.⁷⁰ When the idea of division is coupled with the illustration of the body that Paul has been using in Romans 12, it is to say that a community not driven by love to seek the honor of each other above themselves would be akin to amputation. The next two commands to not be “slothful in zeal” and to “be fervent in spirit” address the difficulty of living in unified love with other Christians. One can almost hear the objections to the commands of “brotherly love” and outdoing in showing honor with claims of fatigue and past pain. In Galatians 6:9-10 Paul also deals with the weariness of ministry to and among other Christians. The endurance necessary for community living must be inspired by Christ (Heb 12:1-3) but also fueled by the believer’s union with Christ. When fatigue in ministry out of love is setting in, believers must look to the example of Christ but also live out their new identity of Christ in them. Giving up is not an option because Christ has not given up on them. In the face of past hurts, the believer is also called to not only endure but face new opportunities to lovingly minister despite the risk of hurt that is involved. The patient love and willingness to be hurt again despite past heartache must also be motivated by Christ’s patience with each believer but also fueled by union with Him (2 Thess 3:5). It is in the face of disagreements and differences that these commands find their best traction. All too often the differences between believers become excuses to withhold love or to give up on loving unity instead of identity in Christ being what drives unity. Macaskill explains, “However, the attitude of love involves a proper recognition of Christian identity and mutual obligation as being grounded in our union with Christ.”⁷¹ The final command in verse 11 is a high reminder of who is truly being served by the believer. The service rendered to one another is service to God. To serve God best is to serve God like Christ. Much more than simply asking “what would Jesus do,” these verses

⁷⁰ Walter G. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 113-14.

⁷¹ Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, 141.

are a deep reminder that salvation brought every Christian into a new community. This new community is to be a community of “little Christs” bearing out in practical, enduring, and unifying ways their service to God and one another as both image bearers and image carriers because of their union with Christ.

Romans 12:12-13: The Believer’s Responses to Suffering

The three commands that Paul now gives in Romans 12:12 address the believer’s responses to the persecution and tribulations that come as a result of being a follower of Christ.⁷² The first two commands directly relate to union with Christ while the third is the natural outflow of the first two.

First, “rejoicing in hope” is an inner happiness that is the result of a faith-filled confidence about the future. Murray writes, “There is no comfort in sorrow except as it is illuminated by hope.”⁷³ This hope is settled by faith for the believer and focused on the promises of God that flow out of His nature.⁷⁴ Ultimately, this hope is expressed for believers in their confidence about their salvation. Romans 8:24-25 reads, “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” Colossians 1:27 points to the specific reality of how hope is borne out of the believer’s union with Christ. Moo states, “Paul’s focus here is on how God’s new covenant people are completely identified with their representative, Christ, and how that new identity gives hope for the future.”⁷⁵ This “complete identification” brings rejoicing in the face of suffering because believers are confident that as they have been “buried with Christ, they will also be

⁷² Moo, *Romans*, 797.

⁷³ Murray, *Romans*, 2:131-32.

⁷⁴ D. R. Denton, “The Biblical Basis of Hope,” *Themelios* 5, no. 3 (1980): 27.

⁷⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 159.

resurrected with Him” (Rom 6:4) as Paul has already assured them. Union with Christ frames the hope of believers regardless of the circumstances they are experiencing.

Second, beyond hope, believers are to “be patient in tribulation,” or to endure through the trials they are experiencing. While Paul is not explicit here in Romans to connect the believer’s union with Christ with endurance in tribulations, the rest of the New Testament bears out this reality. The author of Hebrews calls the believer to be encouraged by the heroes of the faith (Heb 11) that have preceded him and now cheer him on in his race of faith (Heb 12:1). The greatest motivation for endurance is through a fixed focus on the person and work of Christ (Heb 12:2-3). It is not just a fixed perspective but a theological comprehension that the believer is journeying toward the fuller revelation of his union with Christ (Rom 8:22-25). In fact, the suffering that requires endurance is conforming the believer to the image of the One with whom he is united.⁷⁶

Third, the believer is to respond to the hardships of life with a constancy in prayer. This is not the first time Paul moved from hope to endurance to prayer (Rom 8:24-27).⁷⁷ Murray writes, “It is well to observe the interdependence of the virtues enjoined in this trilogy. How dismal would tribulation be without hope (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15:19) and how defeatist would we be in persecution without the resources of hope and patience conveyed to us through prayer.”⁷⁸ The believer’s union with Christ is the life-giving source of hope that brings joy and endurance necessary in seasons of suffering. The reality of this truth should also drive believers to their only source of strength in God through prayer. If KRBC members are to respond to the rejections of the world around them as the cost of knowing and following Christ, then they must come to realize their union with Christ.

⁷⁶ Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, 120.

⁷⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 797.

⁷⁸ Murray, *Romans*, 2:132.

The final two commands of the Romans 12:9-13 pericope center on how believers use their goods as they live out this new mindset of loving God and one another as a reflection of their new identity. They are called to “contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (Rom 12:13). The need for generosity and hospitality were real and obvious in Paul’s day with the presence of traveling ministers, the Jewish Christian diaspora, and the lack of any cultural pressure for hospitality.⁷⁹ The link though between suffering and love is not just a reflection of the culture of first-century Christianity. Already in Romans Paul has developed the relationship of suffering with love so these two commands, which are incredibly practical expressions of love in materially costly ways, should not be a surprise to Paul’s readers.

In Romans 5:3-5, the response by believers to the various kinds of sufferings they are enduring is to be rejoicing. This rejoicing is the result of a new mindset that sees the sufferings for what they are and what they are not. They are tools in God’s hands to produce endurance, character, and hope. They are not signs of God’s wrath on them because Christ has taken God’s wrath for their sins on Himself (Rom 5:6). A believer has this mindset of rejoicing flowing out of this new perspective because of love affirmed by the Spirit. Romans 5:5 says, “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Paul picks up on this same suffering and love relationship in Romans 8. In verse 18, Paul contrasts present sufferings with future glory, which once again is a massive perspective shift. Like in Romans 5, it is the Spirit that helps in Romans 8:26-27 to strengthen and intercede for the suffering believer. Believers are exhorted to be comforted as ones “who love God” in Romans 8:28, but also encouraged because no suffering, or anything, can separate them from the love of God (Rom 8:31-38).

⁷⁹ Kruse, *Romans*, 478.

This instruction on seeing, understanding, and being encouraged by the connection between suffering and love finds some of its richest practical expressions in Romans 12:9-13.⁸⁰ These final two commands, with their tight connection to persecution, provide believers with intensely real means of expressing the love they dwell in through the Spirit, experience from God in suffering, and are now to live out toward others. It is the moral responsibility of the believer to live out toward others the love he has received from God.⁸¹ Eastman writes,

In Gal 6:10 Paul instructed the members of the church to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” In Romans 12 he added specificity to that rather general instruction: “Share with God’s people who are in need” (v. 13). The level of poverty and the need for help were relatively high in the early church. It was critical for believers who had enough and more to share their abundance with those who were in need (cf. 2 Cor 8:13-14).⁸²

Using material goods to showcase love toward other Christians becomes a tangible and visible expression of new familial connections through Christ as well as newfound identity in union with Christ. While Paul is not excluding ministry to the lost, this new reality of identity explains Paul’s emphasis on caring for the needs of other saints.

Romans 12:15-16: The Believer’s Humble Compassion

Paul moves between how Christians are to relate to other believers or the lost throughout verses 9-21. After a brief pause to address relating to persecutors (v. 14), he returns to relationships within the church. Some hold that these commands can be taken as toward anyone, and in a sense, believers are to love others in general. Moo states,

But Paul’s exhortation here seems to pick up his assertion about the mutual and intimate relations of the members of the body of Christ in 1 Cor. 12:26: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together.” Love that is genuine will not respond to a fellow believer’s joy with envy or bitterness, but will enter wholeheartedly into that same

⁸⁰ Eastman, “Oneself in Another,” 118.

⁸¹ Mounce, *Romans*, 238.

⁸² Mounce, *Romans*, 238.

joy. Similarly, love that is genuine will bring us to identify so intimately with our brothers and sisters in Christ that their sorrows will become ours.⁸³

It would seem almost redundant for Paul to return to the theme of love once again, but it is pressed home here in such vivid terminology as to be of tremendous help. To “weep with those that weep” and “rejoice with those that rejoice” is a beautiful manner of communicating the depth of community that is to exist among believers. Calvin notes,

For such is the nature of true love, that one prefers to weep with his brother, rather than to look at a distance on his grief, and to live in pleasure or ease. What is meant then is,—that we, as much as possible, ought to sympathize with one another, and that, whatever our lot may be, each should transfer to himself the feeling of another, whether of grief in adversity, or of joy in prosperity.⁸⁴

To love others is to enter their world of grief or joy so that it becomes one’s own. This spiritually empathetic love is a high watermark of spiritual unity that can only be the result of the work of the Spirit in a group of people.

Paul’s choice of wording in verse 16 drives home the final point of how believers’ union with Christ informs relationships. Romans 12:16 reads, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” Schreiner writes, “The word group related to the verb φρονεῖν (*phronein*, to think) is prominent in this verse: φρονοῦντες occurs twice and the noun φρόνιμοι once. Paul uses these terms elsewhere to urge believers to harmony or to warn against pride (Rom 11:20, 25; 12:3; 15:5; 1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2, 5; 4:2).”⁸⁵ Language arguments aside, Paul is picking up themes he already developed in chapter 12. The believer has already been admonished to deal with his thinking in a transforming way (12:2) and to guard against a proud mindset (12:3). Here is a practical outworking of this new mindset in how believers relate to others. Whether a willingness to serve in humble

⁸³ Moo, *Romans*, 800.

⁸⁴ Calvin, *Romans*, 469.

⁸⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 668.

ways or to relate to people they would naturally think as less than themselves,⁸⁶ the emphasis of having the “mind of Christ” is apparent.⁸⁷ There is no room for a lone-wolf mentality in the Christian community and these admonitions compel believers to be reminded of their need of others, a point Paul makes clear in his discussion earlier on spiritual gifts. Resistance to a self-reliant wisdom is necessary for unity and growth in the life of every believer. Murray writes,

Apparently the conceit in view is that self-sufficiency by which our own judgment is so highly esteemed that we will not have regard to wisdom that comes from any other source. It strikes at the opinionated person who has no regard for any one else’s judgment. “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated” (James 3:17). The opinionated person is intractable and impervious to any advice but his own. Just as there is to be no social aristocracy in the church, so there is to be no intellectual autocrat.⁸⁸

Relationships in the church are bound by love (Col 3:14) that seeks the growth of other believers (Eph 4:11-16), which all flows from believers’ newfound identity individually and corporately in Christ.

Romans 12:14; 17-21: The Believer’s Responses to Enemies

The final section of Romans 12 consists of instructions on relating to those who may cause suffering and hardship and who require loving service (vv. 12-14). While these commands do not directly address the need for KRBC to be taught on union with Christ as it relates to living in community with other believers, it continues to demonstrate the relational impact of union with Christ.

It is important to note that the experience of persecution and suffering is *a priori* of the believer’s union with Christ. It is not believers per se that are inviting the rejection

⁸⁶ Murray, *Romans*, 2:137.

⁸⁷ Christ makes it clear that leadership is through service, and he both taught and demonstrated this throughout His ministry. To follow Christ is to become a servant like the Master (John 13:12-20; Mark 10:35-45; Phil 2:2-8).

⁸⁸ Murray, *Romans*, 2:137.

they are experiencing, but that they are representative of what is hated.⁸⁹ Romans 8:7 reads, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.” The experience of persecution is the result of union with Christ being lived out, but the response is equally sourced in the believer’s union with Christ. Murray writes, “The demand points up two considerations: (1) that nothing less than the pattern of God’s own lovingkindness and beneficence is the norm for us (*cf.* Matt. 5:45-48) and (2) that only the resources of omnipotent grace in Christ Jesus are equal to the demands of the believer’s vocation.”⁹⁰ Because they are in Christ, believers anticipate persecution for righteousness, and since they are in Christ, they can respond with blessing, withholding vengeance, compassionate care, and overcoming evil with good.

The impact of union with Christ on love in the community of believers is significant. However, the practical effects of the newfound identity of the believer of being “in Christ” are not limited only to relating to other Christians. While Macaskill applies, and rightly so, the love now inhabiting believers because of their union with Christ, it is also not limited only to other believers: “The transformation of our lives through the presence of Christ must manifest itself in the practices of love. He is love, and it is Love that now inhabits us and that we, in turn, inhabit.”⁹¹ Comparing the closing commands of Paul in Romans 12:20-21 to the life of Christ and His teaching on loving one’s enemies makes this presence and command of love because of union even clearer. Christ is consistently kind to those that were either actively rejecting Him or ones He knew would reject Him. He feeds 5,000 men only to have them reject Him the next morning (John 6:22-59); He prayed for God to show mercy to the very one’s killing Him (Luke 23:34); and even forgave the thief who just hours prior was mocking Him (Luke 23:39-43). The parable of the Good

⁸⁹ This assumes that the persecution is for righteousness and not evil done by the believer (Matt 5:10-12; 1 Pet 3:13-14).

⁹⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 2:134-35.

⁹¹ Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, 139.

Samaritan likewise enforces the concept of clothing, feeding, and caring for those that would be enemies (Luke 10:25-37). For a believer to be called to feed and clothe enemies is a direct demonstration of loving others with the love of Christ. Where does this love come from? It is Christ in the believer coming out of the believer; it is their union with Christ.

The members of KRBC can be helped to see the extent of the impact of union with Christ by seeing how it connects to, enables, and drives them to love their enemies. If union with Christ is a compelling doctrine that deals with some of these deepest hurts of life, then how much more compelling it is in its impact on relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ?

Conclusion

Union with Christ is a central doctrinal concept that should determine how a believer thinks of himself. Throughout the New Testament, the new reality of being “in Christ” is foundational in instructing believers’ identity. Specifically in Romans, Paul leads the believer on a journey of understanding the new blessings in their lives because of his union with Christ. These blessings build to Romans 12 where the believer’s union with Christ constructs a self-sacrificial mindset. The believer is now “in Christ,” he lays down his sense of self at the altar of this new identity. Union with Christ is therefore at the very center of the work of redemption that occurs in a believer’s life. Believers are as a people, the members of Christ’s body. Michael Horton writes,

Koinōnia involves, therefore, a mutual indwelling of believers in each other in that place that is called Christ’s body, an analogical participation in the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity (John 14:20-23; 17:20-23). Christ indwells us not immediately or essentially, as if our natures were somehow transfused or mingled, but by his Spirit (Col. 1:27). This is the sense in which, through God’s “precious and very great promises,” we now “participate in the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4).⁹²

⁹² Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 185-86.

The identity of the believer is now as one who is in union with Christ and now part of His body. The believer's realization of this new reality is crucial to his behavioral choices.

Romans 12 extends beyond the sacrificial mindset of the believer as one who is "in Christ" to how this impacts relationships with others. The body illustration of Romans 12 points to the outworking of this identity reality in how it influences the relationships of believers with one another. This body analogy finds its fulfillment in the community of the church. The unifying love of believers for one another becomes a significant testimony of the fact that they follow Christ (John 13:35). At the same time, the church is comprised of people that are radically different in every possible regard from culture to class, from professions to preferences, and race to religious backgrounds. These differences are frequent sources of conflict in the early church and extend to the current day. Yet, God is developing a covenant people so that in Heaven there will even be people of "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev 7:9b). These competing realities of the plan of God to show His glory and the significant differences of the members of the church find their solution in living out the reality of the new identity of believers. The glory of God is put on display as people who are radically different from one another are made one through the work of God (John 17:21-23).

The identity of the believer being in Christ and the community of others also found in Christ is a vitally important reality for every Christian. Understanding the reality of their identity and its influence on how to relate to this new community to which they belong is a dominant theme of Romans 12. Without a mature understanding of how union with Christ interacts with a believer's sense of self or how it impacts the believer's community relationships in the local church will leave a believer floundering in living out their salvation.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED
TO UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE
BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

Two significant practical and theoretical ideas must be understood in relation to this project. The first is how a mature understanding of the believer's identity is mandatory for living out their union with Christ. The second is the local church as the primary community through which believers are to work out the reality of their identity. This chapter will demonstrate a right understanding of both concepts.

Identity as Being “in Christ”

The term *identity* can be fraught with baggage in today's age. Identity can be a catch-all term to describe a person's sexual desires, economic status, political affiliations, religious beliefs, and more. It is more helpful to see the origins of identity being used to describe a sense of self than to assume current cultural uses. Erik Erikson helpfully traces its use by psychoanalysts along with its sister term *identity crises* to the 1940s. He pushes forward from these first stumbling steps to provide a foundational understanding of identity: “In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them.”¹ Forming an understanding of a person's identity is akin to fixing a longitude and latitude point where their distance on either axis is in relation to others and their

¹ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 22.

perceptions. In this way it is much more than a reductionist view of a person's particular desires or social standing being elevated to define the whole being.

The social scientist's understanding and definitions surrounding identity has limited helpfulness due to its humanistic worldview and its resultant broadening of terms surrounding identity. Deepak Reju points out seven different concerns with secular social science's understanding of identity.² These all reflect the limited and warped worldview of the lost in attempting to understand humanity. As a result of these errors, the secular world cannot satisfactorily address the problems of identity. It is one thing to recognize the existence of a problem and quite another to offer real solutions. In her critique of the use of Erikson's identity crisis model, Breanna Whitley argues for a comprehensive-internal framework from David Powlison for the use of social scientist's work. She demonstrates a three-step process for applying a comprehensive-internal framework to evaluate the value of a secular psychological idea.³ Apart from this approach, Whitley rightly sees great danger in how psychological ideas, particularly Erikson's, understands and solves the issues of identity. Specifically, Whitley helpfully points out the tension of using the terms or ideas of identity found in social science while redefining these terms and ideas through a biblical framework. Whitley says, "What Erikson may suggest as a crisis must be redefined according to the metanarrative of Scripture. Where Erikson's claims align in any way with this metanarrative, they can be kept as a descriptive level observation of humanity toward humanity."⁴

² Deepak Varghese Reju, "Toward a Definition of Christian Identity: Using the Interpretive Lens of Creation, Fall, and Redemption in Christian Counseling" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 136-141.

³ Whitley says, "Psychology passes through the comprehensive-internal framework with three results: (1) a positive biblical alternative is offered, (2) the psychological claim is exposed, taken apart, and redefined in the light of Scripture, (3) what can be learned is gleaned from the processed claim." (Breanna Mae Whitley, "Applying a Comprehensive-Internal Model for the Evaluation of Social-Scientific Research to the Identity Crisis Stage of Erik Erikson's Developmental Theory" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 70.)

⁴ Whitley, "Applying a Comprehensive-Internal Model," 103.

While this project is not establishing a comprehensive-internal framework for understanding identity, it is operating from a worldview that is decidedly biblical and convinced of the sufficiency of scripture. In the basic usage of terminology, there is helpfulness if these terms are defined through a biblical framework. The secular social scientist does not own the terms. Two examples of theologians who utilize a comprehensive-internal framework are Carl Trueman and Brian Rosner. They both freely utilize social science terms like identity and identity crisis but only through the lens of the authority of Scripture. Trueman uses the term identity as a person's sense of self even as he argues against psychologizing one's identity to reflect the individual's desires. Trueman focuses in on sexual desire as one example of this shift in understanding identity in the secular science realm. Trueman says, "In biblical times or in ancient Greece, sex was regarded as something that human beings did; today it is considered something vital to what human beings are."⁵ Brian Rosner transparently deals with what drove him to study identity in a biblical way by referencing questions of self. Rosner says, "I had lost my sense of self and was forced to revisit the question that you're supposed to settle for good in your childhood and adolescence. That most personal question of all: Who am I?"⁶ In this way, Rosner is using the term identity but as he fleshes out identity, he does so in a decidedly biblical way by focusing on the objective reality of his identity being who God says he is. An identity crisis, a secular social science term, becomes a journey as part of his sanctification. In arguing for the crisis of identity driving him to God, Rosner says, "I made the same discovery in my own search for a stable and satisfying sense of self in the years following my own crisis of identity. As I wondered who I was, it was a great comfort to be reminded that I am known by God.

⁵ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 71.

⁶ Brian S. Rosner, *Known by God*, Biblical Theology for Life, ed. by Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 23.

The goal of this biblical theology of personal identity is to explore that insight in full.”⁷ The worth of ideas like identity, core identity, mature identity, and identity crisis, can have value if their limits are understood. For the Christian, identity is objective and not subjective, as Trueman helpfully argues, but identity can also be better understood, matured, and grown in comprehension as Rosner demonstrates.

Identity is most helpfully understood as one’s sense of self that reflects their created reality. For believers, viewing themselves as being in Christ because of their union with Christ is a critical truth. Erikson’s observations about identity being formed because of self-perception and others’ perception, this longitudinal and latitudinal frame of reference, is reflective of the awareness of believers understanding their greatest sense of self as being “in Christ.” This awareness is internal because of the work of the Spirit (Rom 8:16) and external as affirmed by others.⁸

It is important to understand the significance of mature identity and the role that believers’ newfound self plays in their practice of community. This idea can be explored by first considering identity as a maturing process, secondarily with the effects of a mature identity, and thirdly as mature identity culminating for believers in their being in Christ. This reality should become a controlling factor in how they relate to God and others.

Mature Identity Formation

Of particular importance is Erikson’s observation that identity is neither “static nor unchangeable” but is in process of maturing.⁹ Identity is formed over time because of

⁷ Rosner, *Known by God*, 28.

⁸ God is the primary and most important affirming voice of a believer now being in Christ as a declaration of His truth concerning sin and salvation (1 John 5:12-13). However, the salvation of a believer is also affirmed by their fruitfulness from obedience (Matt 7:24-27) and love of God and others (1 John 4:7-13). The community of other believers also plays a role in affirming the identity of a person being in Christ (Heb 3:12-14; 10:23-31).

⁹ Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 24.

several factors but most significantly because of self-reflection and embracing of who the person is. This process culminates in a mature identity formation where the person acts in accordance with who he understands himself to be.

The importance of this reality in connection to the believer's life is that he is in process of how he thinks about himself in relation to the world around him. While Erikson is not referencing the process of sanctification, his observations about mature identity formation are nonetheless borne out biblically in the process of change to become like Christ that every believer undergoes. Central to this change process is the reality of the believer's identity as being in Christ. Robert Letham writes,

Union with Christ is not only extrinsic, for it has deeply personal effects. We are not only united with Christ in the sense that what he has done we have done because of our being one with him. Being united to Christ, we are also in the process of being made to be like him. When he returns, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).¹⁰

At the heart of this change in a believer is his thinking being transformed. In unpacking Romans 6:11 John Murray states,

"Reckon yourselves" is imperative rather than indicative. What is commanded needs to be carefully noted. We are not commanded to become dead to sin and alive to God; these are presupposed. And it is not by reckoning these to be facts that they become facts. The force of the imperative is that we are to reckon with and appreciate the facts which already obtain by virtue of union with Christ."¹¹

Mature identity is a reality that is in process of formation for every person and for the believer this core identity is his union with Christ. The maturation of this identity is part of his lifelong process of sanctification that takes place in the believer's thinking. How does a believer think about himself? Everyone's mature identity formation is rooted in their ownership of self.

Ownership of self. Self-awareness and self-inspection play vital roles in

¹⁰ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 86.

¹¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:225-26.

forming identity for a person. A mature understanding of identity can be seen as one that embraces a firm grasp of one thing as opposed to another. Deepak Reju provides a helpful illustration of ownership of self with a man grasping the reality of being Chinese and then making choices of what to eat, wear, and cultural experiences to explore based on that grasped reality.¹² The man is making this choice in opposition to other choices of diet, dress, and behaviors based on his ownership of self as a byproduct of his identity. He is aware of who he is and is making choices in accordance with that self-awareness. But this illustration drives one to another consideration. What if a person lacks an understanding of himself? What if they have low self-awareness and do not engage in self-inspection? It is not that they would lack identity but that they would act in accordance with representations of themselves that have been placed on them by others. Reju goes on to say, “A personal agent is inactive towards his self-representation when there is little or no self-awareness. A lack of self-awareness makes it very likely that a person passively lives out self-representations that were conferred by others and are not consciously acknowledged.”¹³ In a truly mature identity pursuit then, a person would be rightly self-aware because of self-inspection.

For the believer, self-awareness is inextricably linked to his relationship with God. Robert Cheong explains, “Though it is a lofty challenge, it is extremely important to pursue self-awareness. When we lack self-awareness, we misunderstand ourselves, and that leads to misunderstanding God as well. Our pride blinds us with inaccurate ideas about who we are in relationship with God.”¹⁴ The process of pursuing ownership of self through self-awareness is a necessary part of the believer’s salvation process from justification through his sanctification. Jonathan Edwards bears out this reality in

¹² Reju, “Toward a Definition of Christian Identity,” 152.

¹³ Reju, “Toward a Definition of Christian Identity,” 153.

¹⁴ Robert Cheong, “The Wonders of Self-Awareness,” Biblical Counseling Coalition, April 8, 2020, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2020/04/08/the-wonders-of-self-awareness/>.

theological depth through his writings. Weddle notes about Edwards that

writing the Personal Narrative was an exercise of autobiographical reflection in which Edwards discovered, and clarified, his sense of personal identity in communicable form which Erikson calls a “style of human integrity.” Implicit in such “discovery” of the self is the responsibility to exhibit that “integrity” in and through human community. Or, in the theological language of Edwards, the revelation of one’s true nature as a subject of God’s sovereign goodness is a gift of grace, to be delighted in and communicated to others, for that divine illumination of the self is the knowledge of salvation.¹⁵

The believer is working out his self-awareness through lenses that are redeemed because of his conversion. In relation to Jonathan Edwards, his own self-awareness comes to full expression in his autobiographical works. It is how he made sense of his own life and identity in relation to his theological understanding of God and His work in and through Edwards. While not intending these works to be published, Edwards nonetheless stands as a wonderful example of a believer rightly developing a mature core identity over his lifetime because of his ownership of self that has been guided by biblical truth.¹⁶

Specifically in the life of a person, in relation to his spiritual condition, a mature understanding of identity would be that he is embracing the reality of either being saved or not, which is to say, whether he is in Christ or not. Owning this reality becomes a basis for behavior. For the believer, union with Christ should play a vital role in the comprehension of the practical ramifications of salvation. While Edwards is a wonderful example of ownership of self and a mature core identity rooted in his relationship with God in his own life, how can any person, and a believer especially, find this for himself?

Mind, will, and emotions. The Bible addresses the totality of a person and social science helps in understanding the role of the mind, will, and emotions in a mature understanding of identity. Ownership of self and its role in mature identity formation can be further understood through this grid of mind, will, and emotions. These categories as

¹⁵ David L. Weddle, “The Image of the Self in Jonathan Edwards: A Study of Autobiography and Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43, no. 1 (1975): 70-71.

¹⁶ Weddle, “The Image of the Self in Jonathan Edwards,” 73.

representative of the whole person impact the necessary self-awareness and self-inspection vital to ownership of self.

The impact is real because of the influence of these categories of a person's redeemed or unredeemed state.¹⁷ Prior to salvation, a person is at odds with God in how he thinks, feels, and acts. Ephesians 2:1-3 says,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The justification of a person redeems positionally but also sets the believer on a course of transformation involving his mind (Eph 2:17-18), will (Eph 2:20-32), and emotions (Col 3:1). Conversion results in new thoughts, new actions, and new desires.

The mind plays a massive role in the formation of and understanding of identity. In identity theory, adolescence figures largely for its role in resolving various identity crises.¹⁸ All of the reasons for this are a mystery but one factor seems to be clear. The increased cognitive ability of an adolescent to have self-consciousness. The adolescent's ability to think, reason, consider, evaluate, and argue about life brings them into a space where they can consider themselves and their place in life and community.¹⁹ This cognitive capacity is substantially important to identity formation no matter the age of the individual. The transformation of the mind to a new way of thinking, a Christ-like way of thinking, is rooted in the believer being in Christ (Rom 12:2). For the believer to have ownership of

¹⁷ It is my understanding that regeneration precedes conversion logically (Rom 8:29-30), so repentance and faith are the first signs of justification and union with Christ. The immediate spiritual change of a person takes place at their conversion (2 Cor 5:17) but there is also the lifelong process of transformation of their whole being until they are glorified (Phil 1:16).

¹⁸ Identity crisis is the result of the conscious and unconscious reality and choices of a person brought into clarity and consideration by some conflict in life. It is a process where a person considers their past and their future in relation to their community in understanding their true self. Erik H. Erikson, "Autobiographic Notes on the Identity Crisis," *Daedalus* 99, no. 4 (1970): 732-33.

¹⁹ R. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural change and the struggle for self* (New York: Oxford University, 1986), 205-6.

self, there is by necessity a reordering of the way he thinks. Their cognition must be brought into line with the authority of the Bible.

The will of a person, his exercise of choice, also plays a vital part in identity formation and understanding. While a person operates within a conferred identity, who he is told he is, there comes a point where he begins making his own choices that form his constructed identity. In opposition to their conferred identity James Marcia notes, “In contrast, identity begins to be constructed when the individual starts to make decisions about who to be, with what group to affiliate, what beliefs to adopt, what interpersonal values to espouse and what occupational directions to pursue.”²⁰ This operation of a person’s will is setting the stage for a mature identity. Marcia points out that not everyone follows this step and do not realize identity achievement.²¹ Self-awareness for the believer is achieved in part by cognitive choices to align his thinking and actions with the commands of the Bible. The actions of their Holy Spirit empowered will bears out their redeemed state.

In the realm of emotions, a person tends to be reinforced in an identity based on the positive or negative emotions he experiences in relation to that identity. Jan Stets helpfully illustrates this with a person holding to being academically inclined in her identity. If they perform well or poorly on a test, the accompanying positive or negative emotions will influence their future acceptance or rejection of their identity being academically inclined.²² In the spiritual realm, a person’s emotions will influence his understanding of his identity in relation to God. The Bible describes the lost person as being at odds with God (Jas 4:4). The believer though is now filled with the love of God

²⁰ James Marcia, “The Identity Status Approach to the Study of Ego Identity Development,” in *Self and Identity: Perspectives across the Lifespan*, ed. T. Honess and K. Yardley (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 166.

²¹ Marcia, “The Identity Status Approach,” 167.

²² Jan E. Stets, “Examining Emotions in Identity Theory,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2005): 41.

so that he loves Him and others with God's love (1 John 4:7-12). The negative or positive emotions toward God will play a role in self-awareness for any person. For the believer, coming to understand how it is that he now loves God and pursues an increasing love for God and others will frame his sense of self. The believer can increase his ownership of self by increasing his awareness of and acting out of this new divine love present in him by virtue of his union with Christ.

An intentional process. While a person is who he is whether he considers who he is, mature identity formation requires an intentional approach. The healthiest formation of identity happens for those that make intentional choices to frame who they are. The ideal expression of this is known as identity achievement. Marcia says, "Identity Achievements are individuals who have experienced a decision-making period and are pursuing self-chosen occupation and ideological goals."²³ While this process in a person's life happens predominantly in adolescence, even secular research points to the continuation of this process into adulthood.²⁴ This disposition of self-consideration is advocated by the Bible for every believer (Rom 6). The reality is that for the believer, a massive identity change is happening at his conversion and from that point in his life forward. They are on a path of discovering who they now are in Christ. This newfound identity should be realized in an increasing way for every believer.

Mature identity formation is a goal for every person. To have a sense of self in relation to others that fully informs the individual of who he is, why he does what he does, and helps to discern his past and discover his future, is psychologically healthy. A secular researcher might refer to this as a mature identity, or with Marcia and Erikson as Identity Achievement. The result of an intentional process of maneuvering identity crisis through

²³ James Marcia, "Identity in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. Joseph Adelson (New York: Wiley, 1980), 161.

²⁴ Marcia, "Identity in Adolescence," 159-60.

ownership of self incorporates the mind, will, and emotions. For the believer, it is a much richer process where he is coming to a further understanding and outworking of who he is in Christ. Theologically, mature identity is part of the role of sanctification because of an intentional pursuit of becoming more like Christ that involves the whole person. The relationship of identity formation for the believer and the intentional ongoing pursuit of Christ in sanctification is an intimate one. Letham writes,

Sanctification also has an ongoing element. This is its most commonly recognized aspect. It is most evident in ethical terms. The letters of Paul are replete with injunctions about how we are to live. The possibility that we can do this, at least in part, is due to the Holy Spirit's work within us, transforming us into the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The ethical characteristics Paul enjoins he also describes as "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22f.). Here again, the dynamic of union with Christ comes to present expression in the life experience of believers.²⁵

The intentionality of sanctification helps to form the mature identity of the believer in living out his union with Christ.

Effects of Mature Identity

Is there really any danger if a person does not have a mature identity? Alan Waterman holds that there are four criteria for determining optimal psychological functioning. Ultimately, this optimal functioning is described as a sense of well-being, the realization of goals of the individual, positive interactions within his social context, and realization of goals of his social context.²⁶ After applying these four criteria to research on the effects of a mature identity in a person, Waterman concludes that those with a mature identity tend to have greater acceptance of self, happiness, and avoid negative emotional states like anxiety and depression.²⁷ Knowing his place in society in correlation to his specific complex makeup of gifts, abilities, experiences, and desires

²⁵ Letham, *Union with Christ*, 87.

²⁶ Alan S. Waterman, "Identity as an Aspect of Optimal Psychological Functioning," in *Adolescent Identity Formation*, ed. Gerald R. Adams, Thomas P. Gullotta, and Raymond Montemayor (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 51.

²⁷ Waterman, "Identity as an Aspect of Optimal Psychological Functioning," 62-63.

makes for an overall happier and more stable person. There are two primary benefits of a mature identity to consider, core identity and consistency.

Core identity and consistency. James's epistle seeks to address the inconsistent behavior of some of the early believers. To this end, he addresses their dual focus on God and the world. This doublemindedness of some believers left them as unstable as ocean waves (Jas 1:6). Douglas Moo explains, "But as the word's basic meaning suggests, James is probably thinking of a strong kind of doubting: a basic division within the believer that brings about wavering and inconsistency of attitude toward God."²⁸ This inconsistency of thought toward God leads James to address behavior that is inconsistent with faith. James cannot fathom genuine belief in God that does not result in behavior consistent with that belief system. The believer who has genuine faith will have works consistent with his newfound identity in Christ. Consistency in behavior is one of the premier benefits of a commitment to a mature identity. This commitment is at the core of who a person is, and therefore what he does. Once again, this commitment finds its source in how the person thinks. Steven Hitlin says, "The thoughts claimed by the individual constitute his or her personal identity, a sense of consistency in self over time."²⁹ But as has already been seen, identity is more than just thoughts but also highly relational. In arguing for the dual nature of a person being both physical and spiritual, Nancey Murphy deals with the question of the link between the identity of a pre- versus post-resurrection believer. She is wrestling with how a believer can say he is the same person.³⁰ In doing

²⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 60.

²⁹ Steven Hitlin, "Values as the Core of Personal Identity: Drawing Links between Two Theories of Self," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2003): 120.

³⁰ Nancey Murphy, "Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Challenges," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. Richard Lints, Michael Scott Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 106-8.

so, she makes helpful observations about the core identity of a believer and its impact on the totality of life, both temporal and eternal. Murphy writes,

So what are the criteria for “same person?” And what is there about you that seems to be necessary so that on the day of resurrection you will happily recognize yourself to have survived? I have argued that the criteria include continuity of memories, continuity of consciousness itself, continuity of moral character, and continuity of relationships. I especially want to emphasize continuity of one’s relations to others in the Body of Christ and to Christ himself.³¹

This continuity and consistency are hallmarks of the reality of redemption but also the result of the growth of a believer in coming to grips with his union with Christ that has occurred in redemption. Reju concludes, “Identity change can occur throughout a person’s lifespan, but after a person has committed to particular identity elements, there is an overall tendency to maintain consistency. Information that conflicts with the status quo will tend to be ignored or discounted.”³² Behavior patterns that image Christ will become the increasing norm for believers as they are committed to their core identity in Christ.

Christian Identity John 15:1-11

While secular researchers advocate for mature identity with its various benefits and as a normative and healthy process of growth, for believers, their mature identity is that they are in Christ. No greater reality would affect their understanding of self, their relationship to the world around them, and the various gifts and abilities of their lives than this truth. It is fascinating that Harold Grotevant offers the possibility that identity for a person could be understood in the context of the story of their life.³³ Believers are, in this sense, coming to understand how Christ’s story is their story and His story provides the framework for making sense of their own lives. John 15:5-11 provides a basis for understanding how whether a person is in Christ or not is foundational for

³¹ Murphy, “Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Challenges,” 107.

³² Reju, “Toward a Definition of Christian Identity,” 155.

³³ Harold Grotevant, “Assigned and Chosen Identity Components: A Process Perspective on Their Integration,” in Adams, Gullotta, and Montemayor, *Adolescent Identity Formation*, 88.

identity. John 15:5-11 also establishes how the believer's core identity is his union with Christ and how it impacts the consistency of his behavior.

In Christ or not as core identity. John 15:1-11 is the climactic moment in John's account of the farewell discourse of Christ. He quotes Jesus in employing vine imagery to express Christ's role in the redemptive story as well as expressing the role of believers in living out the power of Christ because of their now being "in Him."

Prior to the arrival of Christ, Israel played the central role in God's redemptive plan and was frequently imaged as a vine (Isa 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Ps 80:8-16; Jer 2:21; 6:9; 12:10-13; Ezek 15:1-8; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hos 10:1-2; 14:7). However, Israel as the vine is often noted for its lack of fruit bearing.³⁴ This theme of a lack of fruit bearing versus bearing fruit is used by Christ to differentiate between those that are saved and those that are not. The stunning imagery of verse 6 points to the punishment of hell for those that are not "in Christ." With the advent of Christ, this vine imagery takes on new power with Christ being the central figure of fruit bearing. Andreas Köstenberger explains, "As the paradigmatic vine, Jesus embodies God's true intentions for Israel: Jesus is the channel through whom God's blessings flow."³⁵ Fruit now happens because Christ is the power at work in and through all of God's covenant people to bring forth God honoring fruitfulness.

If union with Christ is to serve as the core identity of the believer, one would anticipate relational and behavioral implications. This is exactly what is on display in John 15. Hans Burger says,

Jesus is the true vine. Apart from him, his disciples can do nothing (15:5), but remaining in him they will bear much fruit. He is the source of life and only in a communion of reciprocal inhabitation will his disciples find life and be fruitful. One remains in Christ by keeping his words (15:7), praying (15:7), remaining in his love (15:9), obeying his commands (15:10). As a branch of the vine, one is never alone,

³⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 513.

³⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 491.

but always together with the vine and other branches. A branch cannot live of its own, apart from this communion. The metaphor has not only Christological, but also ecclesiological implications.³⁶

For Christ to define the central aspect of a person's life, that which determines his temporal existence and eternal life, as being "in Christ" or not is incredibly telling. It points to the absolute necessity of the abiding presence of Christ in a person for him to have any hope of living for the glory of God. It establishes the only true source of a person being able to love God or his neighbor, which is at the very crux of existence (Mark 12:30-31). To be "in Christ" is the core identity of a believer.

In Christ as the basis for consistency in behavior. The core identity of a person is what tends to determine the consistency of their behavior. Some researchers have come to identify a person's values as being the best way of expressing the relationship between identity and behavior. This is not to say that the values that are held always determine behavior. In fact, researchers note that behavior can influence values and values can influence behavior. Hitlin states,

Our values, then, cause us to possess a sense of a unified, transsituational personal identity. These values in turn are enacted and articulated situationally through the intermediate development of various role-, group-, and value-identities. Of course, the behaviors we enact as a result of our identities can cause us to reflect on our values and, over time, to find different values most compelling. When this happens, we experience shifts in our personal identity, our sense of "who we are." Thus the relationship of values at the core of the self to the various identities we incorporate into our sense of self is not unidirectional.³⁷

Scripture makes this very point when believers are called to interact with other believers' behavior. When the behavior is negative, opposed to God's moral code, the interaction is confrontational and can even rise to a question of core identity and whether the person is in Christ (Heb 3:12-14). On the positive side, the call to other believers is to live considering their identity in Christ and to have behavior that images that reality (Heb

³⁶ Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 363-64.

³⁷ Hitlin, "Values as the Core of Personal Identity," 122.

10:19-25). Behavior can influence identity so that when they do not match, it causes the person to reevaluate either his sense of self or his actions. Even this reveals that, typically, core identity or values determine consistency of behavior.

John 15 calls believers to live out the reality of their identity in Christ in how they relate to God and others. The goal throughout the pericope is to bear fruit that is overseen by God (John 15:2), is from the power of God (John 15:4), informed by the Word of God (John 15:7), is for the glory of God (John 15:8), and is lived out in obedience to God (John 15:10). The believer's identity is determining and establishing a consistency of behavior. Verse 8 provides the overarching perspective of God on the identity and behavior of those that are in Christ. The word used by Christ to describe this behavior is fruit. Colin Kruse writes, "The 'fruit' is most likely the outcome of their entire life and ministry as they remain in fellowship with Jesus by keeping his commands and experiencing his presence with them through the Spirit."³⁸ A firm grasp of being in Christ with a focus on that new reality is intended by God to provide a basis for consistent behavior that demonstrates the presence of the power of God in the believer. John 15 proves that the maturing process of a believer is to come to understand his core identity as being in Christ and to live out that truth in consistent behavioral choices to reflect that reality.

Summary

Romans 12 is clear in demonstrating the necessity of the believer to live in the reality of his union with Christ. However, for this truth to have its greatest effect, the believer must understand union with Christ as more than a theological concept but also as the truth of their identity. Unpacking what it means to be in union with Christ is a process of identity discovery. In light of that truth, it becomes important to see the pursuit of this theological reality as a process that takes place over time involving the believer's mind,

³⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 315.

will, and emotions as he intentionally seeks to grasp and live out this newness of life as the very core of who he is. They can anticipate a greater consistency of righteous behavior that is reflective of being in union with Christ and the joy that accompanies this existence (John 15:11). This journey can lead the believer to rejoice in experientially declaring with Paul that “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The Primary Community for the Believer to Live Out His Union with Christ

It is unhelpful to think of who a believer is apart from what a believer does. John 15 bears out this reality in Christ not just calling believers to abide in Him but to love and obey Him. Who they are in their identity must be lived out in practical reality. Romans 12 makes it clear that for a believer to be in union with Christ, a new mindset is mandatory, and that new mindset must be carried forward in behavior consistent with this new way of thinking. Galatians 2:20 is Paul’s autobiographical declaration of this in his admission that it is not him living but Christ living in and therefore through him. Scripture makes it plain that who a believer is in Christ is life itself for them. Life with its attitudes, desires, and actions are to be borne out of the believer’s union with Christ. But where do they live out this identity of union with Christ.? To say that identity is borne out in actions is to presume the presence of others to receive, observe, or be the focus of those actions. The core of the gospel itself is a call to love God and to love neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). To live out the gospel reality of union with Christ demands actions according to love within a community.

The community that is a focus for the believer to live out this identity of union with Christ is the local church. The apostle John communicates his own zeal for the fellowship that should happen among believers in 1 John 1:1-3:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the

word of life the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This communion or fellowship among believers and God is defined by Thabiti Anyabwile, who in reference to this text in 1 John writes, “Those verses teach that the essence and foundation of all true spiritual and biblical fellowship is the life of God in the soul of man experienced personally by believing the truth and shared relationally in the church.”³⁹ Growing in awareness of this truth and applying it to his life will be part and parcel of developing a mature identity for the believer. The presence of the community of a local church provides a safe space for the exploration of the implications of union with Christ, a training ground for the development of this identity, and a kind of spiritual thermometer to assess growth in this truth. It is imperative to understand the local church as a community, its members, how they relate to each other, and how this is God’s plan for advancing the glory of Christ.

A community is a distinctively different group, so a hallmark of a community is their differentiation from others around them. But what makes a community of God’s people a distinctly different group? In relation to God’s people as a community, it can be summarized as His presence. This can be understood through seeing God’s relationship with His people Israel in the Old Testament. God establishes the nation of Israel with accompanying distinctive markers like circumcision and the law of Moses. However, His presence among them was the greatest distinction. Leviticus 26:11-13 reads, “I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.” God promises to this group of

³⁹ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church: The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Fellowship* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 17-18.

people to relate to them in a different way than from anyone else. They are His covenant people made distinctive by the presence of God. Mark Rooker writes, “Verses 11-13 reiterate the essential nature of Israel’s relationship with God. This special relationship with God is the goal of the covenant, for the Lord takes up residence among the Israelites in the same way he does in the tabernacle.”⁴⁰ This presence of God forms the basis of their distinctiveness as a community. This presence of God was in their midst physically as well as spiritually but not within every individual within the community. As the Old Covenant ends, there is an envisioning of a New Covenant where the members of that community individually enjoy the presence of God. The promise of Ezekiel 36:25-28 boldly promises an internal dwelling of God with every member of His covenant people. The distinction of this community will be God’s internal dwelling presence with each person.

The universal church is the identification for God’s people under the New Covenant. This people are significantly distinct from all other people by their relationship with God through salvation. Paul helpfully references Leviticus 26:12 in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 as he addresses the local church in Corinth. He is burdened for them to live out the reality of the indwelling presence of God. His call is for them to live a distinctively different life from those in the world because they are a distinctively different community because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ As Paul concludes his call to the Corinthians to live a holy lifestyle reflective of the abiding presence of God, he makes it clear that this is relational.⁴² Believers are God’s covenant people. This covenant people are invisible as the universal church but are intended to be made apparent through their

⁴⁰ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 315.

⁴¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 349.

⁴² Peter Balla, “2 Corinthians,” in Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 770.

personal behavior (Matt 7:15-20) and through their relationship with other believers as primarily seen in the local church (John 13:35; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet 2:1-12; Gal 3:27-28). While every believer is a member of the universal church, the local church is the primary visible community for the believer to practically live out his union with Christ.

The Church as Community

Identifying a community is typically relegated to determining the commonalities shared by the individuals within. This can be as simple as their shared relationships and the depth of concern they have for one another.⁴³ It can also be much broader and incorporate shared language, culture, experiences, or purposes. In current culture it has been relegated to sexual orientation or beliefs as an outworking of identity.⁴⁴ In speaking specifically about faith communities, Adam Dinham notes that they are typically geographically regional, share history and values, have common actions, and a sense of solidarity.⁴⁵ What is unique about the local church as a faith community is both its difference from the previous community of God's covenant people, Israel, and their shared commonalities. Whereas under the Old Covenant there were ethnic barriers, these are done away with under the New Covenant. Beyond these differences between the covenants, the local church is marked by differences in their service to other members, their common authority, and their corporate worship. These differences and shared commonalities help to understand the local church as the primary community in which believers are best able to work out their identity in Christ.

The local church is an identifiable community. The existence of the universal

⁴³ David M. Chavis and Kien Lee, "What Is Community Anyway?," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, May 12, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.48558/EJJ2-JJ82>.

⁴⁴ Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 139-44.

⁴⁵ Adam Dinham, "What Is a 'Faith Community?,'" *Community Development Journal* 46, no. 4 (2011): 530-36.

church is not sufficient to fully see or understand the community for those that are now in Christ. God in His wisdom has also designed for the existence of local churches as visible expressions of the universal church. The universal church is only comprised of redeemed people. Since the universal church is reflective of the redemptive work of God and comprised only of believers, so the local church is also best served by maintaining a redeemed membership. Daniel Slavich says, “In the eternal decree of the Father to save sinners in the Son by the Spirit, it was likewise determined that these sinners would be united to a set-apart assembly, the church, which would exist most pointedly in local expression on earth.”⁴⁶ There are two components to this reality. First, there should be biblically based safeguards to ensure that those that become members of a local church are in fact saved. Second, there should be the practice of church discipline to deal rightly with those that claim Christ but are living in an unrepentantly contradictory manner to those claims. In combining both of those components, the local church becomes a visible expression of Christ.

Even as Christ was setting the stage for the local church as the visible expression of the New Covenant community, he was giving guidelines for those that would be part of this community and those that are not. The dividing line between those in the covenant community of the church are those that are redeemed and those that are not. Christ emphasizes obedience to his teaching (Matt 7:15-24; John 15:10-14, Luke 9:23-27), love for God and others (Matt 22:37-40), and belief in him as the Son of God and Savior (Matt 16:13-19) as markers of the division between the lost and the saved. In 1 John, the defining markers of believers is obedience to Christ (1 John 2:3-4), love for God and others (1 John 2:5-17), and persistent belief in Christ (1 John 2:19). There is continuity between Christ and the apostles as to the characteristics that demonstrate a person is a believer. Every person that is saved is a member of the universal church and this is part of the kind gift of

⁴⁶ Daniel T. Slavich, “That the World May Know: A Trinitarian Multiethnic Ecclesiology” (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 185.

God. What is incumbent on a local church is to have a membership that carries forth the same necessary requirements for membership in the universal church. The membership of a local church should then only be those that are saved. Mark Dever writes, “A few passages in the New Testament seem to refer to the church in the abstract, or universally, but the overwhelming majority of references to the church are to a local, living, and loving collection of people who are committed to Christ and committed to each other.”⁴⁷ While every local church may investigate a candidate for membership based on their own guidelines, it would seem clear from Scripture that it should involve considering candidates’ beliefs about Christ, salvation, and evidences of salvation by love and good works.⁴⁸ Local church membership is an affirmation in a visible way of the reality that a person is in fact a believer and member of the universal church.

Why then would a church remove someone from their membership? In a membership process for the local church there is recognition that the individual claiming Christ is demonstrating this through a life of increasing Christlikeness. The defining difference in the Sermon on the Mount is obedience that results in fruit (Matt 7:15-24). One of the fruits is repentance from sin. When there is an absence of repentance, Christ sets the stage for the removal of a person from the membership of that local church (Matt 18:15-18). Discipline is a public declaration that a local church no longer has confidence in a person’s declaration of faith.⁴⁹ This discipline process is expanded upon and enacted after the church is established. This expansion of discipline helps to understand the local church as its own community. Each local church has the authority to admit and remove its

⁴⁷ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, expanded ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 149.

⁴⁸ Kennerly Road Baptist Church has three requirements for membership: (1) Profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ followed by baptism by immersion (or provide a letter of recommendation from another church of like faith and order); (2) Demonstration that he or she has been born again; and (3) Wholehearted agreement to the Constitution, the Covenant, and the Declaration of Faith.

⁴⁹ Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 88.

own members.⁵⁰ In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul advocates for the church to remove, to discipline out, one of their members for immorality. Paul is not necessarily following the guidelines set out by Christ in Matthew 18 in a step-by-step format. Paul is following the commands of Christ in dealing with someone who is claiming to be a believer and yet living in unrepentant sin. First Corinthians 5:11-12 is clear in making a distinction between the members of a local church and those that are not. Paul does not believe a local church wields authority over everyone. He makes it clear that the affirmation of a person's claims of faith in Christ is under the authority of the local church in which he is a member. Each local church is its own self-judging community.⁵¹ Galatians 1:8-9 advocates for a local church to remove a teacher who is instructing contrary to the true gospel. Again, there is a limitation on the extent of the authority of a local church. It is limited to a false teacher in their midst. First Timothy 4:20 is an example of this type of process of dealing with a false teacher or a leader in the church in unrepentant sin with a public rebuke. It is once again localized to that church. Whether a leader or a member, each local church is responsible for safeguarding the membership from those that claim belief but do not have lives to support that claim. The local church is identifiable by those that they permit into membership as well as by those that they exclude or remove from membership.

The outworking of these two components of a redeemed membership and right discipline can provide visible expressions of the New Covenant people of God in the form of local churches. This visible expression of the New Covenant people of God, the local church, becomes an identifiable community in which the believer is called to operate and work out his union with Christ.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 204.

⁵¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 227.

The local church is a multi-ethnic community. Under the Old Covenant, God's people were noted for their Jewishness as signified through His creating and choosing of this nation and marked out by legal demands and the physical demonstration of circumcision. While there was always inclusion of Gentiles, the primary understanding of God's covenant people were the Jews. Ethnicity and culture played a major part in understanding those who were God's people and those who were not. From the Tower of Babel there had been divisions based on language that led to the development of various cultures and ethnicities. God creates a new nation through Abraham and His covenant with him (Gen 12:1-3). This covenant included a promise of a specific location to house this new nation (Gen 15:18). However, this covenant also foresaw a descendant who would be a blessing to all nations (Gen 22:18). Not all of Israel would receive the full blessings of being God's covenant people because they were not saved. Yet many received some of the blessings that were not redeemed. This is made most explicit in the New Testament.⁵² While there was space for the inclusion of Gentiles within the Old Covenant, their inclusion was never explicit so that there existed a significant ethnic barrier under the Old Covenant.

Within the worship guidelines were divisions of access based on ethnicity as well. These divisions are displayed in the various courts within Herod's Temple complex. The Outer Court permitted entry of Gentiles and was bordered by a wall restricting access into the next court. The Women's Court was next where Jewish women could enter, and it also was distinct from what was called the Court of Israel. The Court of Israel was for Jewish men only. The Court of Priests, as its name suggests, was for priests only.⁵³

⁵² Paul in Rom 9:23-29 quotes from Hos and Isa to prove that not all Jews were redeemed and that Gentiles who are called are "true Israel." He is making explicit that which was somewhat veiled in the Old Testament. The arrival of the New Covenant and the church is bringing into the full light of understanding that which was before only a shadow.

⁵³ Alan J. Hauser and Earl Kellett, "Temple, Herod's," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016).

While the Old Covenant is filled with various barriers of access based on ethnicity and gender within the Law, the New Covenant is visibly different. Any lingering remnant of these divisions as far as position in Christ or primacy in His plan is done away with. While there may remain roles to fulfill in the community based on age, gifting, maturity, and gender, none limit access to God personally. Instead, these barriers that existed in part under the Old Covenant and in extreme in secular culture have been overcome by being made a new community (Acts 2:40-47; Gal 3:27-28).

In relation to ethnicity with its accompanying culture and language barriers, the church is to be multi-ethnic. When the wickedness of men was united in idolatry at the tower of Babel, God confused their languages (Gen 11:1-9). The church and the New Covenant are a restoration of the unity that was lost by sin at Babel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

That the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel, as a result of which people can no longer understand each other, because everyone speaks a different language, should at last be brought to an end and overcome by the language of God, which everyone understands and through which alone people can understand each other again, and that the church should be the place where that happens—these are great and momentous thoughts.⁵⁴

This restoration begins to happen at Pentecost as people of many languages hear the gospel proclaimed in their own tongue and are saved (Acts 2).

The multi-ethnicity of the church is also to be seen as a direct reflection of the nature of God Himself. The argument of a multi-ethnic church is an argument for unity amidst diversity. Ephesians 1:9-10 forms a basis for understanding this reality in an ethnic sense with its declaration that the Son has come to bring unity where sin has broken the world, which includes racial and ethnic divisions. Francis Foulkes explains,

This letter, moreover, does not merely speak of a distant goal, but presents the ongoing task of the church in a world divided by barriers of race, colour, culture and political system, as that of bringing all things and all people into the captivity of

⁵⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 53.

obedience to Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5), and so back to find their true functions and unity in him.⁵⁵

In support of the idea that this is different visually in the church, if not the idea of God from eternity past, is Paul saying this is a mystery (Eph 1:9). This previously hidden truth was, in part, the unification of Jews and Gentiles, through Christ, as God's covenant people. This is made even clearer by Paul in Ephesians 3. Slavich says,

God had been keeping an amazing surprise for the cosmos and humanity most of all, and He is now through Paul's ministry showing what that surprise is: an assembly of both Jews and Gentiles united together in the body of Christ. This was God's plan all along, "his eternal purpose" (3:11). Cast in terms of the eternal, triune pactum salutis, the triune God decreed the creation of the church as a united assembly. Here God's eternal purpose to display His wisdom does not shine generically from the heavens so much as it refracts through the diversity of humanity included in the multiethnic church of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

This unity among diversity theme is brought to bear by Paul as he implores believers to a unity that is reflective of the Trinity in Ephesians 4:4-6. Mark DeYmaz makes the convincing argument that this is not only for the universal, unseen church, but for the local church as well.⁵⁷

Believers anticipate a final reckoning of all the redeemed to represent the multi-ethnic work of God. Revelation 7:9b reads, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands." This kind of community is incredibly counter-cultural. Within God's covenant people and redemptive history, it was a mystery until the formation of the local church with its overturning of Babel and its unified reflection of the Trinity. The longing for Revelation 7:9 is to be foreshadowed here and now by the local church.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 62.

⁵⁶ Slavich, "That the World May Know," 189-90.

⁵⁷ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley, 2007), 30.

⁵⁸ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 113.

The local church is the community for a believer to work out the reality of his identity as being in Christ. The local church is the God designed community to demonstrate the unity among diversity that is reflective of the Trinity.

The local church is a community that serves each other. The community of the church is marked by its behavior toward its other members. The earliest expressions of the church where its members are identified in such a way as to be numbered is to sacrificially love and serve each other (Acts 2:45). This service is an expression of the identity of each member of the community as being now in Christ. They are literally the hands and feet of Jesus to each other bearing out the heart of Christ. First Peter 4:10-12 commands believers to utilize their spiritual gifts through the empowerment of God in order that the glory of God is put on display. Thomas Schreiner writes, “When those who speak utter God’s words rather than their own and those who serve do so in God’s strength rather than their own, God through Jesus Christ receives the glory. God receives the glory because he is the one who has provided the wisdom and strength for ministry.”⁵⁹ The list of spiritual gifts in 1 Peter is far from comprehensive but can instead be understood in two broad categories as speaking and serving gifts. Regardless of the kind of gift each believer possesses, it is incumbent on the believer to understand that the working out of the gift is from God, for God, and toward others. Specifically in 1 Peter it is in the context of the local church.⁶⁰

The community of the local church is full of people who are in union with Christ and therefore possess varying spiritual gifts. The manifestations of these gifts are demonstrations of the person of God in them by virtue of their union with Christ. Anyabwile explains, “Do we then see our need for the entire local church? The full range

⁵⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 215.

⁶⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 182.

of God's gracious actions to us comes to us by the use of gifts He has sovereignly put in the various members of the body. We can't live and thrive apart from these grace gifts, and can only find them in the church."⁶¹ Growing in the use of these gifts and experiencing life with other believers growing in their own use of their gifts is an important component in developing each believer's mature of identity of being in Christ.

Each individual member of the community is called to serve all other members based on the love they have for God and each other. They serve because they love. In helpful contrast to the Old Covenant law, Paul makes the case in Galatians for a newfound freedom for the believer. In this new community of the local church, believers are compelled by love to serve each other. Galatians 5:13-14 says, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Timothy George notes,

The glorious good news of justification by faith is that Christ has delivered us *from* servile bondage to the law and from captivity to the cosmic forces of evil. But the freedom we have received is not a static thing, something to be saved and admired and stroked like Silas Marner polishing his gold coins. No, true freedom is realized only in the slavery of love. Paul's admonition to mutual service is thus not a restriction on freedom but rather the very means of its actualization.⁶²

Love among believers is an ultimate declaration of their union with Christ.⁶³

The local church is a community submitted to one authority. This community of believers is founded in their new identity in Christ, seen in their service to one another, and united by their submission to one authority. The entire community has a relationship with authority. Clarke Cochran makes the argument that authority can only

⁶¹ Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, 88.

⁶² Timothy George, *Galatians*, New American Commentary, vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 378.

⁶³ John 13:35 reads, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

really exist in the context of a community.⁶⁴ If there is no community to lead, can there be a leader? Jesus makes it clear that the authority that exists in the local church is really His authority. The authority of Christ is bestowed with His presence on even a small group of two or three that gather in His name representing Him.⁶⁵ The authority of Christ through His teaching is passed on through the apostles.

The earliest expression of the church in Acts 2:42 finds the believers united in their submission to the teaching of the apostles. Certainly, the transition in Acts 2 is happening between the group that followed Christ to a new entity called the church. Where Jesus was their obvious authority there would seem to be a vacuum now with His ascension. This vacuum was filled by the office of apostle, inhabited by a select group of men. But what gives the office its authority is God through His Word. Jesus instructed the apostles to teach others what they themselves had been taught by Him. Matthew 28:18-20 reads, “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The continuation of the authority of Christ through the apostles is predicated on the passing on of the instruction Christ had given.

The apostles transferred this same derived authority through the establishment of local churches led by elders.⁶⁶ The essence of this authority is always determined by the character of Christ in the elder (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9) and their adherence to the

⁶⁴ Clarke E. Cochran, “Authority and Community: The Contributions of Carl Friedrich, Yves R. Simon, and Michael Polanyi,” *American Political Science Review* 71, no. 2 (1977): 547.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Leeman, “The Nature of Church Authority,” *9Marks Journal* (Summer 2016): 28.

⁶⁶ Paul did not see churches as complete or mature unless elders had been appointed (Titus 1:5). The apostles were willing to submit to the authority of the elders in Jerusalem as a kind of governing board (Acts 15:1-29). Peter saw his role of feeding the flock of God (John 21:15-17) as being passed on through elders (1 Pet 5:1-4). The author of Hebrews believed in the authority of elders (Heb 13:17).

teachings of Christ and the apostles (Gal 1:8). To be led by Christ is to be led by His Word through gifted and qualified men who are holding forth the example and instruction of Christ (Phil 3:17). The authority of Christ serves to unite the community of the local church. There is no better place for believers to grow in the comprehension and application of their identity of union with Christ than in the atmosphere of a local church.

The local church is a community that worships together. The community of redeemed people work out their unified identity, mutual love, and submission in common worship (Acts 2:42, 46). From its inception, the local church was identifiable by their worship. The “breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42 is an act of corporate worship in its context of apostolic instruction, fellowship, and prayer. Some argue that this is not a direct reference to observing the Lord’s Table but still a worship meal for the community,⁶⁷ while others declare that it was identification with Christ and the community in observing the Lord’s Table.⁶⁸ John Polhill writes, “Joined with fellowship, it would likely carry the cultic sense of sharing a meal with the Lord, participating in the Lord’s Supper.”⁶⁹ Robert Jamison, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown see it as a combination of a community meal and the observance of the Lord’s Table, a sort of forerunner to what Paul is compelled to correct in Corinth.⁷⁰ What each of these views have in common is the belief that the “breaking of bread” is an expression of corporate worship in the early local church. The errors in Corinth only serve to further this view as Paul must correct a wrong application

⁶⁷ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 161.

⁶⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 88-89; John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 138; Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1887), 457.

⁶⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, 138.

⁷⁰ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1997), 2:176.

of worship in that local church (1 Cor 10:15-17). The Lord's Table was a worship act of many now united. Many who are incredibly different in gifting, liberty issues, socio-economic standing, male and female, and culture are all united by and through Christ and this unity is demonstrated in their worship.

Union with Christ is a community reality revealed in corporate worship. The identity of each believer as being in Christ is manifested as they unite with others who are in Christ to celebrate and worship Christ.

Summary

The believer's union with Christ is the central aspect of his identity. They must consider themselves to now be "in Christ." Working out the reality of that identity through an intentional process of maturation in both comprehension and practice must occur within a community. The best community for that to take place is within the confines of a local church. In the church they will have their faith affirmed and encouraged (Heb 3:12-14; 10:23-25). In the church they will discover the spiritual gifts that have accompanied the indwelling of Christ (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12). In the church they will be called to demonstrate God to the world through overcoming ethnicity and race by virtue of being united with others who have union with Christ (Eph 2:11-22). In the church they will unite with others under the lordship of Jesus and their authorities (Acts 2:42). In the local church they will worship, particularly around the Lord's Table, with others that have been put into Christ (Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 11:17-32). Union with Christ is individual in its expression for every believer, but it is also to be lived out in the community of the local church.

Conclusion

The concepts of identity and community are mission critical for the believer who seeks to live out what it means to be "in Christ." Grasping identity is not a light bulb moment but only happens as the result of a process for each person in relation to others.

For the believer, the process of mature identity formation is inextricably linked to union with Christ and the blessings that accompany this reality of redemption lived out in community. Only as a believer can fix his sense of self in proximity to God and others will he work out the implications of his identity. For the believer, mature identity formation is the result of coming to a greater understanding of union with Christ, and this happens best as the believer explores this reality in the community of the local church.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to train the members of Kennerly Road Baptist Church in Irmo, South Carolina, to understand their union with Christ as a basis for biblical community. Three goals were developed to further the achievement of this purpose and to evaluate the project's effectiveness. The first goal was to assess the current comprehension of the believer's union with Christ and its implications for biblical community among the members of KRBC. This goal helped to inform the development of the second goal, which was to develop and teach an eight-session series for adults on the believer's union with Christ. These eight sessions occurred over eight consecutive Sundays during the regular morning worship service of KRBC. The completion of the second goal led to the third goal, which was to increase the comprehension of the believer's union with Christ among the members of KRBC. This assessment was accomplished through the administration of a post-series survey. This chapter details the preparation and implementation of this project.

Preparation, Information Gathering, and Survey Assessment

The preparation and information gathering phase of the project included announcements to the congregation, administration of the pre-series survey, and assessment of the data collected from the survey.

Preparation

Two weeks prior to the planned implementation of the project, announcements were made to the KRBC congregation to prepare them for a new sermon series on union

with Christ. Since there would be some differences in the normal approach to preaching, it was important that the congregation understood the intent and distinctiveness of this new series.¹ The church had been supportive in prayer and comments as the project was commencing with an expressed eagerness to participate and to grow and learn from the series. During this phase, confirmation was made with the expert panel of curriculum evaluators so that they were prepared to interact with each lesson as it was sent to them.

Information Gathering

The project officially began with the administration of the Union with Christ Understanding and Application survey over the course of two weeks. Administering the survey over the course of two weeks enabled for widespread participation among the church attendees. Since the project focused on the membership of the church, special care was given to ensure that every participant identified their membership status on the survey.²

Survey Assessment

Since the results of the survey would help to inform the content of the eight-session series, assessment of the pre-series survey was conducted. Of the twenty-five members who eventually participated in taking the survey, twenty members completed the survey in the first week. While the results of the other five were also included, an initial 55 percent involvement of the church membership gave a high confidence in at least a general understanding of interpreting the survey results. This afforded the opportunity to begin work on a general series outline.

¹ Since 2011, the regular morning worship service at KRBC has utilized an expositional preaching style working through individual books of the Bible.

² Because this project involved human test subjects, all the instruments used obtained prior approval through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee. Approval for the implementation of the project with adherence to appropriate ethics standards was granted on May 2, 2023. Implementation of the project through the administration of the survey began on May 7, 2023.

Initial consideration of the survey indicated that there was a high degree of confidence among participants in understanding and applying union with Christ, which created a question as to the validity of the project with five of the twelve survey statements garnering an average of “5” or above.³ However, further investigation into the results combined with recent events in the church pointed to the continued need in understanding union with Christ and its application to community based on four factors.

The first factor examined was that since the project was first considered in the fall of 2021, the church had experienced a series of significant events that impacted the membership. The church had a radical shift in membership numbers because of employment driven moves, deaths of members, and a church split that occurred through the winter and spring of 2022. These changes radically altered the makeup of the church. The result was a 59 percent decrease in membership in the span of six months.⁴ The pain of decline was acute, yet it resulted in greater service involvement of those left in the church. By God’s grace, nearly every member got involved in a serving capacity. This appeal and increase in physical service was reflected in the answers to statement 8 on the survey, which focused on serving others with their time over the past month.⁵ The question that arose from this result, though, is if this is in reflection of the shift in the membership and needs of the church or of an understanding of their identity based on the believer’s union with Christ? Evaluating the responses to survey statements 1 and 2 shed light on the response to this question. Survey statement 1 called the participants to consider conversations they have had with other believers about union with Christ and scored the lowest of all with an average of 3.12, while survey statement 2 evaluated how union with

³ See table A1 in appendix 2.

⁴ In the fall of 2021, KRBC had 88 adult members. In the spring of 2023, KRBC had 36 members.

⁵ See table A1 in appendix 2.

Christ was informing the way they thought about who they are and scored only 4.08.⁶ Even more telling is the observation that nearly half only “agreed somewhat” or “disagreed” that union with Christ informed how they considered who they are. The answers to these two statements, which center on the doctrine of their union with Christ informing their identity and then discussing the doctrine of union with Christ with others, had the two lowest scores among the survey takers. This would seem to indicate that while survey participants serve well, they do not necessarily do so out of their identity in Christ.

The second factor was the implementation of Life Groups in the fall of 2022. These groups are small group gatherings outside of Sunday services where people gather for prayer, spiritual encouragement, and growth in knowing one another. Initial exploration of instituting Life Groups was met with moderate to low interest. However, with the impact of the events of the winter and spring of 2022, by the fall of 2022 there was excitement and large-scale buy-in to the philosophy and need of Life Groups. The result has been over 90 percent involvement by the KRBC membership. This is reflected in the answers to statements 6 and 11 on the survey. These statements scored an average of 5.37 and 5.16 respectively.⁷ Interestingly, there was a lack of expressed generosity among the participants as reflected in the lower score of giving money to serve others as reflected in statement 8. Could this indicate that it was easier to attend a Life Group than to part with personal resources? If this was the case, then once again, understanding union with Christ would help participants grow beyond what was expected publicly to how they behave privately out of their identity in Christ.

The third factor that supported the continuation of the project and eight-session series was the disparities between statements 3, 4, and 5. These statements revolve

⁶ See table A1 in appendix 2.

⁷ See table A1 in appendix 2.

around the need for believers in general to know their spiritual gifts, if participants knew their gifts, and if participants used their gifts. The issue of whether believers in general should know their gifts had the highest score on the survey. However, there was much less confidence in the participants' knowledge of their own gifts and use of them. This pointed to a belief that spiritual gifts are important but there was a lack of clarity in personal application of this truth. Teaching that connected the presence and use of spiritual gifts to the believer's union with Christ could help close this gap.

The fourth factor that pointed to a continued need for understanding union with Christ and its application in community was the low scores for statement 9 of the survey. This statement specifically asked the participant to consider their involvement in contributing to helping build a stronger community at KRBC and had an average score of 4.33.⁸ This could be interpreted as a lack of confidence in how they do or can help build stronger community or a right self-awareness that they are not doing this. For Paul to repeatedly use union with Christ as a basis for understanding community and for the local church to be the best community to work out the believer's union with Christ, this was an incredibly important result. It showcased that participants largely did not understand the link between these two truths of union with Christ and community.

Curriculum Writing, Evaluation, and Implementation

With the assessments of the pre-series survey complete, curriculum writing began in earnest. With the depth and importance of the doctrine of the union with Christ, the beginning of the series would focus heavily on establishing a clear definition and understanding among participants. Each of the initial weeks of the series involved the writing of that week's lesson, submission of the lesson to the expert review panel, modifications to the prepared lesson based on feedback from the panel, preparation of a Prezi to supplement the lesson, and presentation of the session itself.

⁸ See table A1 in appendix 2.

Week 1

The first lesson was an exegesis of Romans 6:1-5 with the goal of introducing the doctrine of union with Christ and providing the students a workable definition for the doctrine. The first lesson for the eight-session seminar was submitted to the expert panel for review and all responses from the panel were received in a timely manner. The expert panel played an important role in helping to assess the content of the material as well as fulfilling the second goal of the project. The first week's lesson achieved a 91.6 percent rating from the expert panel, indicating a high degree of satisfaction for the content of the lesson and every area of review scoring at least satisfactory.⁹ The expert panel did make helpful suggestions for improvement to the lesson and those changes were made. The second lesson was also written and submitted to the expert panel for review.

A Prezi was prepared to accompany the first lesson to aid with student understanding and retention along with printed handouts of the manuscript of the lesson, which was provided to any interested participants.¹⁰ The session was videoed and added to the church website, Facebook, and podcast platforms for any that missed the session. This process of a Prezi, handout, and internet postings of the sessions took place for each of the eight sessions in the series.

The first week of the implementation of the eight-week series began with the teaching of the first session on Sunday, May 21, 2023.

Week 2

The second lesson was an exegesis of Romans 6:5-14 and focused on helping students differentiate between the spiritual and practical aspects of union with Christ. The curriculum rubric for the second lesson was received from the expert panel with high marks. A table was included in the lesson that intended to help students make clearer

⁹ See table A7 in appendix 8 for the expert panel review scoring of each lesson.

¹⁰ The Prezi for week 1 can be viewed online. Stephen Johns, "Lesson 1: Union with Christ: Identity in Christ," accessed May 21, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/cv0jPLd9xbuzCkOatjW/>.

distinctions between being united in the death of Christ and united in the resurrection of Christ. While the expert panel scored the lesson itself high, two evaluators found the table confusing, so this afforded the opportunity to make changes to the table to help with clarity. The week ended with writing the third lesson and submitting it to the expert panel, preparing an accompanying Prezi, preparing a handout, and presenting the lesson on Sunday.¹¹

Week 3

The third lesson focused on Romans 12:1-2 and sought to develop the theme of daily sacrifice being the norm for the believer because of their union with Christ. The expert panel made helpful suggestions concerning the table that provided union with Christ truths on one side and practical implications for life on the other. When it came time to present the material, I followed their suggestions and publicly shared three connections I could see and then allowed some audience interaction for a few suggestions. This seemed to help the students make application of the truths in their own lives and I was thankful for the suggestions. A Prezi was prepared for this lesson to accompany the sermon.¹² The week concluded with writing and submitting the lesson to the expert panel for week 4.

Week 4

The fourth lesson focused on Romans 12:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 to help students process how they should see themselves and others in the church as being united with Christ. A Prezi accompanied the sermon.¹³ The lesson highlighted the body language Paul uses to describe the interconnectedness that is to exist in the local church. During the

¹¹ For Prezi for week 2 see Stephen Johns, “Lesson 2: Union with Christ: Foundational Truth for Daily Life,” accessed May 28, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/2wnzP9JnDThnb5WYTg3P/>.

¹² For Prezi for week 3 see Stephen Johns, “Lesson 3: Union with Christ: Sacrifice,” accessed June 4, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/Mka60ZWmHySWl6HnouN9/>.

¹³ For Prezi for week 4 see Stephen Johns, “Lesson 4: Union with Christ: Me to We,” accessed June 11, 2023 <https://prezi.com/view/zgqTN9vZmgCxrJlNP7t/>.

church testimony time this week, several members expressed appreciation for the series and truths they were learning. A substantial number of unexpected needs and meetings necessitated delaying completing the writing of week 5's session.

Week 5

The writing of the fifth lesson was finished early in the week and submitted to the expert panel. This lesson utilized the students' prior understanding of spiritual gifts due to extensive teaching at KRBC in the past. It sought to remind students of the purposes of spiritual gifts to glorify God and edify one another with specific connection to how this expresses the believer's union with Christ. The lesson utilized multiple passages on spiritual gifts to make this case.¹⁴ This session included homework for the students to complete during the week. Of special note was the use of a chart that provided definitions of seven current spiritual gifts in use which helped with homework from the session. However, this chart also sought to assist in areas of the survey where students scored low in relation to identifying their own spiritual gift and considering its use in the church.¹⁵ The week concluded with preparing a Prezi to accompany the sermon and writing and submitting the lesson for week 6 to the expert review panel.¹⁶

Week 6

The sixth lesson was an exegesis of Romans 12:9 and sought to establish the necessity of a divine love at work in the believer. This divine love is the result of the believer's union with Christ and serves as an umbrella for understanding the ensuing commands for the believer in the remaining verses of Romans 12. This lesson included active participation from the students by physically moving during the lesson to group

¹⁴ The lesson relied on Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; 1 Pet 4:10-11; and Eph 4:11-12.

¹⁵ See table A2 in appendix 3, statements 4 and 5.

¹⁶ For Prezi for week 5 see Stephen Johns, "Lesson 5: Union with Christ: It's Time to See Christ," accessed June 18, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/j0ftHBtS18OAGey5JNJG/>.

themselves based on varying criteria. This was particularly well received and helped to engage listeners. This lesson had great interaction and several students remarked that hearing that Christ is our pattern and our power to love others was particularly helpful. The week concluded with the preparation of a Prezi to accompany the sermon and the writing of and submission of the lesson for week 7 to the expert panel.¹⁷

Week 7

The seventh lesson sought to build on week 6 by dealing directly with Romans 12:13. The two commands of contributing to the needs of the saints and seeking to show hospitality were chosen to demonstrate how union with Christ goes to the core of how believers steward their time and money. The lesson focused on the need for believers to open their hearts first before they can open their homes to others. The application of the lesson centered on offsetting the discouragement that can occur in doing ministry (Gal 6:9-10). One practical answer to this discouragement was offered to students in the form of the power of gratitude. They were challenged to express gratitude to others for how they have been loved by Christ through them. The second greatest deviation on the survey pre-test focused on gratitude, demonstrating that some KRBC members agreed with the fact that they show gratitude while many others either only agreed somewhat or even disagreed.¹⁸ There was hope that this lesson and its application would assist students in living out a better understanding of ministry they have received from others as reflective of others' union with Christ. The week concluded with the preparation of a Prezi and the writing of the final lesson and its submission to the expert panel.¹⁹

¹⁷ For Prezi for week 6 see Stephen Johns, "Lesson 6: Union with Christ: Love at the Core," accessed June 25, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/sZZGS2tGgxfBPuZmK3NB/>.

¹⁸ See table A2 in appendix 3 statement 12.

¹⁹ For Prezi for week 7 see Stephen Johns, "Lesson 7: Union with Christ: Hearts & Homes," accessed August 2, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/ggWbS5tobjGIRRzgN3x/>.

Week 8

The eighth and final lesson wove together two primary texts of Scripture to encourage students to be life-long learners of their union with Christ. James 1:5-8 and supporting texts throughout the book were used to demonstrate the doublemindedness of the believer that is not living out genuine faith. John 15:1-11 was used to showcase the desire of Christ for the believer to understand and live out the reality of their union with Him. The process of pruning that leads to greater fruit bearing was used to encourage students to a life-long pursuit of understanding and living out the truth of their union with Christ. The final Prezi for the series was prepared to accompany the sermon.²⁰ The week concluded with the administration of the survey post-test following the final session.

Weeks 9 and 10

The Understanding Union with Christ and Application post-series survey was administered for those that were not physically present for the final session and to afford time for others to watch lessons from any weeks that they had not been able to attend due to absence or other ministry responsibilities. Results for the post-series survey were compiled and analyzed with *t*-tests to analyze if there were significant statistical differences between the pre- and post-surveys to determine if goal 3 of the project was met.

Post-Series Survey Administration and Information Gathering

The post-series survey was administered over the course of two separate Sundays. Due to summer travel constraints, this timeline allowed students to catch up on any missed lessons to get a better sample pool from which to gather accurate data. Twenty post-surveys were collected that fit within the research criteria and could be analyzed to determine if goal 3 of the project was met.

²⁰ For Prezi for week 8 see Stephen Johns, "Lesson 2: Union with Christ: A Life-Long Journey," accessed August 9, 2023, <https://prezi.com/view/SKbTghq5L11sBarxWDOo/>.

Conclusion

At the end of the ten-week period, from the implementation of the pre-series survey to the collection of the post-series survey, all three goals of the project were completed to a level where evaluation of their success or failure could be accomplished. The next chapter will evaluate the project on its purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

While the project benefitted the church and the author by nature of its focus on such a rich doctrine, only by critical evaluation can real benefit be gauged in measurable means. This chapter will provide an evaluation of the project from a broad perspective in its purpose and goals and move to a more detailed consideration of strengths and weaknesses of the project as well as its impact on me personally through theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the members of Kennerly Road Baptist Church in Irmo, South Carolina, to understand their union with Christ as a basis for biblical community. The project was borne out of the desire to see the growth and maturation of church members in understanding their identity in Christ and how that should inform their relationships with others in the body. One thing that was revealed through the project was a disconnect between behavior and union with Christ. While there were indices of correct behavior within the church, there was a disconnect with how behavior should flow out of a healthy and maturing understanding of the believer's union with Christ.

Romans 12, as demonstrated in chapter 2 of the project, details the critical role that union with Christ must play in the life and community of the believer. The eight-session series spent significant time in Romans unpacking this reality. Statistically significant growth in KRBC members in their understanding and communication about their union with Christ demonstrates the effectiveness of the series and the project. Making sure that the authority of Scripture is what was driving the need for union with

Christ to be the controlling influence of how the believer relates to others helps ensure its lasting effect.

While KRBC has a culture of care for one another, it seems evident that this is the result of several factors that were not all rooted in deep theological understanding of their individual identity in Christ. While I am grateful for the atmosphere of love and concern that has grown out of the soil of trials, I am more grateful for this project that helped expose doctrinal weakness in comprehension and bolster biblical motives for right behavior.

The test results and goal evaluation will help to demonstrate the value of the project and enforce the truth that the purpose was needed and sound.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Successful completion of this project's purpose depended on the completion of three goals. This section offers an evaluation of these three goals.

Goal 1: Comprehension of Union with Christ

The first goal was to assess the current comprehension of the believer's union with Christ and its implications for biblical community among the members of KRBC. This goal was accomplished through the development and administration of the Understanding Union with Christ and Application survey.¹ To fulfill the goal of assessing the membership of KRBC, the survey asked the taker to self-identify as being a member of the church. Only those surveys that indicated membership were used in the project. The survey included a place for a self-identifying four-digit code so the survey taker would remain anonymous. The survey itself was comprised of twelve Likert scale statements that gauged behavior related to a right understanding and application of a believer's union with Christ.

¹ See appendix 1.

This goal was considered successfully met when (1) 50 percent of the adult members completed the survey and (2) the results had been compiled providing a clearer understanding of the understanding and application of these truths in their lives in relation to the theological truth of the believer's union with Christ.

At the beginning of the project's implementation, there were thirty-six KRBC members.² Twenty-five members took the pre-series survey, which was 69.44 percent of the membership, which exceeded the minimum 50 percent involvement.³ This fulfilled the first part of the first goal.

The second part of the goal was accomplished with an assessment of the results from the pre-series survey. The lowest scores centered on discussing union with Christ and union with Christ informing the participant about their identity. This affirmed the need for the project since union with Christ is to be at the very core of the believer's sense of self. Combined with statement 10 of the survey, which asked about the impact of sermons on the participant that scored with the second highest mean of 5.50,⁴ the results pointed to the potential ability of the series on union with Christ to increase understanding and application of union with Christ among the membership. Contributing to strengthening community, generosity, and expressing gratitude to one another at KRBC also scored lower on average. These three categories would also point to a lack of understanding of how being in Christ should guide the behavior of believers. Sessions that highlight the basis of community in the church being founded on salvation, using temporal means for eternal value, and seeing and experiencing Christ through one another should all help to increase understanding and application of union with Christ. Three statements that dealt with spiritual gifts affirmed the shared perspective of the

² All the current members of KRBC are 18 years of age or above.

³ See table A2 in appendix 3 for the results by pin number of the pre-series survey.

⁴ See table A1 in appendix 2 for a summary of the results of the pre-series survey.

importance of the gifts but also only an agreement for knowing their own gifts. Including the sessions, material that would assist participants in not just seeing the importance of their spiritual gifts but knowing and using them would also help to make connections with their understanding and application of their union with Christ.

With the completion of the pre-series survey by over 50 percent of the current membership and adequate analyzing of the results, the first goal of the project was met.

Goal 2: Eight-Session Series

The second goal was to develop and teach an eight-session seminar for adults on the believer's union with Christ. This goal was met when the eight sessions were prepared, evaluated by an expert panel of at least 3 ordained ministers with every area of the rubric scoring at least satisfactory,⁵ and then taught to the membership of KRBC. Any area of any session that did not achieve a minimum rating of satisfactory would be adjusted and then resubmitted to the expert panel until it achieved a satisfactory level.

The expert review panel was comprised of four ordained ministers. One has served as an elder at KRBC since 2018 and holds a Master of Arts from Columbia International University. Another member of the panel holds a Master of Arts from Reformed Theological Seminary and has served as the pastor for Administration and Member Care at a church in Greenville, South Carolina, for eight years. A third member of the panel has served as the senior pastor for three churches and holds a Master of Divinity from Reformed Theological Seminary as well as a PhD in progress with all but dissertation completed from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. The fourth member of the panel has served as a pastor in the United States, currently serves as a missionary in Brazil, and holds a DMin from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. All these men are capable teachers and theologians and provided invaluable feedback and support throughout the curriculum writing and presentation process.

⁵ In percentage form, this required each lesson to achieve a minimum 75 percent rating.

While every lesson scored above the minimum rating of satisfactory on its first attempt, the suggestions made in the comments section by the expert panel helped to improve the lessons each week.⁶ With each lesson achieving the minimum rating of satisfactory in every area from the expert panel and each lesson having been taught to the congregation of KRBC, the second goal of the project was met.⁷

Goal 3: Increase in Comprehension of Union with Christ

The third goal of the project was to increase the comprehension of the believer's union with Christ among the members of KRBC. This goal was measured by readministering the survey to those that had attended at least six sessions of the eight-session seminar. This post-test differed from the pre-test in asking participants to indicate that they attended the sessions and had completed the pre-test prior to the sessions. This goal was considered successfully met when two criteria were completed. First, when at least 80 percent of those that attended the eight-session seminar and completed the pre-series survey had completed the post-survey, and second, when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-test survey scores.

Twenty-three post-surveys were returned by KRBC members. However, three did not meet the requirement of having attended six of the eight sessions, so their results were not included in the assessment of goal 3. This left twenty post-surveys by members who had attended at least six of the eight sessions in person or by video. This met the first criteria of goal 3 that required 80 percent involvement of the post-series survey by members who had attended at least six of the eight sessions.

⁶ See table A7 in appendix 8.

⁷ The minimum percentage score to successfully accomplish goal 2 would have been a 75 percent rating from the expert panel for each lesson. The lowest score of any lesson was lesson 1, which was scored at 91.40 percent by the expert panel. The mean for all the lessons was 96.09 percent. See table A7 in appendix 8 for the results from the expert panel for all the lessons.

Analysis of the post-surveys was performed by first determining the mean and median scores of the twenty members' surveys and then comparing those scores to their pre-series survey scores. A *t*-test was then performed to evaluate if there was a statistically significant difference between their scores. The *t*-test results indicated a *p* value of $<.001$, indicating a statistically highly significant difference in the median scores.⁸ Having demonstrated that the eight sessions had achieved a statistical difference in the pre- and post-series survey scores, the second criteria for goal 3 was met.

Strengths of the Project

The primary strength of the project is that it met KRBC in its greatest need. The members of KRBC needed to see the vital link between who they are in Christ and how they relate to each other in the body. The pre-series survey indicated that while there were commitments to relational connection and care for others in the body, it most likely was not the direct result of understanding their union with Christ. A failure to be driven by doctrine would leave the church at risk of drifting from these positive behaviors since they were not ultimately grounded in a firm grasp of the true foundation behind the behavior. The greatest increases in the pre- and post-series survey were in the areas of understanding the role of the believer's union with Christ and how it relates to the individual's responsibility in building a stronger community.⁹

Since the project utilized the morning service time slot for teaching the series, it freed the second time slot on Sunday mornings for testimony, reflection, and practical application of what had just been heard. While the response lay outside of the scope of the research methodology of the project, the effect on the ground was tangible. There were multiple expressions of gratitude for a new and deeper understanding of the need for

⁸ See table A5 in appendix 6.

⁹ This can be seen in the greatest increases in the mean scores between the pre- and post-series survey on statements 1, 2, and 9. See table A3 in appendix 4.

community in the church. Several made intentional efforts toward service and expressions of gratitude. Pastorally, I was immensely thankful to see the eagerness for the material and appropriation of its truths in the daily lives of the members.

Interaction with the expert review panel proved to be significant in the communication of the truths in the series but also provided a platform for greater use. One expert panel member anticipates using the material in an ongoing adult Bible study class at his church. Two other members of the expert review panel advocated for the material to be made available to other ministries either in book form or other printed form. This reflects the insight and investment of other gifted teachers who are passionate about the growth and maturity of the universal church. Any curriculum that would be produced from this material is a direct result of the investment of these men and their passion for the Word and growth of the church of Christ.

Weaknesses of the Project

Four weaknesses of the project are worthy of note. Two deal with the instruments used, one with the scope of the eight-week seminar, and one with the timing of the seminar. First, the survey should have avoided the use of the phrase *union with Christ*.¹⁰ It appeared that the students applied their own understanding to this term while at the same time answering in ways that did not support a robust comprehension of union with Christ. Since the lessons provided a working definition of union with Christ for the students, it would have been more helpful to have used descriptors of the doctrine to elicit clearer responses on the survey or to have provided a definition on the survey itself. While the size of the church would have made a qualitative survey difficult, a small group gathering of leaders in the church to discuss and ask questions surrounding union with Christ prior to the eight-week sessions would have been another approach to gauge true understanding of the concept.

¹⁰ See appendix 1.

Second, the lesson evaluation rubric should have been clearer. Two reviewers stumbled at the question under pedagogy that referenced student interaction.¹¹ This could have been more clearly stated as either points of directed reflection for the students, homework given to the student, or clear application made to the lives of the student. The subjective nature of student interaction came up early in the comments of the expert panel. I attempted to mitigate this weakness with greater audience interaction throughout the series and a few homework assignments along the way.

Third, while there is great worth in the doctrine of union with Christ, eight weeks may have been an overly ambitious length of time for the material in a sermon setting. While it is important to state and review information for greater retention, there is significant overlap in the truths contained in union with Christ. This overlap, spaced over eight weeks, could seem redundant with similar points of application each week. There is the danger of the student sensing they are hearing the same material from a different text. This could work against the profitability of the project with student apathy instead of engagement.

The fourth and last weakness was the timing of the eight sessions concluding during the summer months. This is notoriously a time of significant travel for most of the families in the church. The impact of this was felt the most in obtaining sufficient post-series survey's for evaluation purposes. More consideration as to the timing of the series could have worked better with the church and culture's calendar to finish stronger.

What I Would Do Differently

The timing of the project is a significant change that I would make. In the fall of 2022 KRBC instituted Life Groups. Small group gatherings took place in the homes of members every other week. These groups focused on prayer and discussion of the previous Sunday's sermon. The small group atmosphere provided a greater depth of application and

¹¹ See appendix 7.

connection with others in the church. Due to the shifting schedules of many members during the summer months, these groups only meet from September through the end of May. Since this project took place during the summer, I was not able to capitalize on Life Groups as a place to both discuss what the members were learning or have a scheduled way to put into practice the truths they were learning about community. It would have been advantageous to have either used the project in the fall to help establish the purpose and goals of these Life Groups or in the spring to cement the idea of union with Christ and community prior to the summer break.

Another change would be either the length or the setting for the material. As noted in the weaknesses portion, eight weeks in a sermon setting may have been too long. If the timing of the sessions were kept in a sermon format, then I would shorten the length to six weeks. In that time, the major aspects of union with Christ could be taught as well as setting the stage for the student's future understanding of its application to their lives through regular preaching. If the format were changed to a twelve-week session to match a regular Sunday school quarter, it would afford more opportunity for student interaction during the class and a more comprehensive approach to the topic.

Theological Reflections

The first time I considered the impact of believers' sense of self in relation to how they interacted with other believers in the local church was during a sermon series on 1 Corinthians that I preached in 2020. Seeing the warped understanding of self in the church in Corinth and its contribution to the copious number of issues in that church was eye-opening to how I saw KRBC. While there was not a one-to-one correlation of every issue in KRBC to the issues in the church in Corinth, there were enough to cause me to consider similar causation. Critically, the way KRBC members related to one another seemed to be lacking. Working toward a better theological understanding of identity revealed the doctrine of union with Christ as the key theological issue at play. This process led to the question in my own mind if the members of KRBC developed a better

understanding of their union with Christ, would it advance their understanding and obedience in relating to one another? This process that led to this project and the project itself have led to four theological reflections.

First, there is no greater issue in a people's lives than to know if they are in Christ or not. Understanding that union with Christ is a doctrinal declaration of the reality of salvation makes it a binary issue. Either a person is in Christ or not (Rom 6:1-5). While Christian culture continues to attempt to define this reality with phrases like *born again* or pleas to *ask Jesus into your heart*, these are attempts to invite the lost or explain to others this vital reality of Christ in the believer. Continuing to find ways to unpack this truth of union with Christ within my teaching and preaching will help to differentiate the reality of salvation to my listeners. Understanding that there are always going to be people in the church that believe they are saved when they are not increases my burden to make the gospel reality of union with Christ as clear as possible (Matt 7:21-23). While John 15:1-17 had a deep impact on me personally, this project led me to a greater appreciation for this powerful sermon from Christ. Fruits of joy and love and evidence of obedience as direct results of being in union with Christ afford a golden opportunity to encourage believers about their identity in Christ and call the lost to salvation. Using texts like John 15:1-17 as a consistent means of explaining union with Christ, using His illustration, is an important way to lead people to the critical issue of whether or not they are in Christ.

Second, appropriating the truth of the believer's union with Christ is central to spiritual maturity and health. Chapter 3 demonstrated the sociological understanding of how a mature understanding of identity leads to emotional maturity and mental health. The observations of generations of psychologists only affirm the deep wisdom of the Bible surrounding what it means to have a truly mature understanding of who a believer is in Christ. This realization deepened my understanding of Paul's autobiographical claim in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ

who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Paul had a full and mature comprehension of his union with Christ and its implications for how he did life. This mindset is less about doing something than living out the already present reality of life in Christ. I must realize in a deeper way that Christ is both my pattern and the power for my life.

Third, there is no better place to appropriate the reality of the believer’s union with Christ than in the community of the local church. I have long been convinced of the vital importance of the local church for every believer. However, this project gave me a deeper appreciation for how God intends to use the community of the local church to help every believer grasp a deeper comprehension of who they are in Christ. Whether using their spiritual gifts or being blessed by the gifts of others, experiencing the person of Christ through others, or experiencing the beauty of unity amidst diversity, the local church is part of God’s kind gift to help believers understand their union with Christ. In the same way, no person could live a hermit life and truly grasp who they are, so a believer cannot live separate from the community of believers and have a mature grasp on their union with Christ.

Fourth, my own spiritual health and maturity during pastoral ministry needs to consistently come back to my union with Christ. Pastoral ministry has come with a fair amount of trauma in my life. This project helped me to be refreshed by and deepen my understanding that my identity is not as a pastor but as a believer who is in Christ. It is refreshing to be reminded that I have died with Him and been buried with Him, but also raised with Him. Pastoral ministry is a vocation and calling where I am working out the reality of who I am in Christ, and this is healthy and good for my soul.

As I complete this project, I am burdened for the flock which I serve to grow in their comprehension and application of their union with Christ. Though, I am just as burdened for my own soul to continue to experience the refreshment of the truth of my own union with Christ.

Personal Reflections

This church and my family underwent radical changes from when I first conceived of the project and its conclusion. In the interim, the church experienced governmental lockdowns because of the pandemic and the ongoing fallout that many churches experienced post lockdown. I would affirm that KRBC experienced what is described by Karl Deenick when he says, “It made me realise that lots of church gatherings are an ‘in-person’ equivalent of people sitting at home watching church on the couch—people might be physically present in the church building but relationally and functionally they are inhabiting a kind of invisible cubicle.”¹² The “invisible cubicles” of KRBC were formed around preferences regarding church-life, hobbies, and response to the pandemic. When the church began meeting again in person there was a noticeable distancing among groups that eventually played out as a church split. The split was not over doctrine, sin in the church body, or leadership decisions per se, but on a desire for independence and to do church “my way.” While this pointed out the need for the project, it felt like too little too late for the good that the project may bring. I leave this in the hands of the Lord but the pain of the experience of the loss of friends and to the church made teaching on union with Christ and its application toward community acutely painful. It was kind of God to see those still in the church respond with such joy in the lessons and eagerness to learn, grow, and change.

In my family life, I experienced the diagnosis of my wife with stage 3 colon cancer, the death of my grandmother, and the death of my father in the span of three months in 2021. These things each brought the project to a halt as I focused on the care of my wife and children while trying to navigate deep loss through death in my family. The delay felt costly academically and pastorally. I have had to repeatedly run to truth that God is sovereign, and I am not, and His timing is perfect.

¹² Karl Deenick and Sam Wan, “Church Life Post-COVID: A Conversation with Karl Deenick,” The Gospel Coalition, May 4, 2023, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-life-post-covid-a-conversation-with-karl-deenick/>.

While the pains of these events in the church and in my family were felt throughout the process, God always used this project to bolster me. Seeing the connections between my union with Christ and how this relates to my identity was a significant comfort. My identity is not as the pastor of a thriving church or a shrinking church. My worth and value is not as a caregiver, husband, son, or grandson. Instead, I am in Christ and He is in me and that is the most important reality that exists. What lies before me then is a life of living out that reality. Instead of ultimately seeing the difficult events of the past few years as hindrances to this project, I have come to see this project as tailor made by God for my good as much as anyone else's to comfort, grow, and change me. I am grateful to God, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the patience of my professors and advisor for the opportunity to finish my studies.

Conclusion

It is somewhat bittersweet to come to the end of this project. It has felt like an overwhelming burden at times and a kind respite from the storms of life at other times. The truths of union with Christ and biblical community have become dear friends and I trust these truths will continue to change me for years to come. More importantly, while I have long been convinced that a church needs to be centered on the Word, worship, and community (Acts 2:42-47), it has been the emphasis on community that has brought the most pushback and rejection in this ministry at KRBC. It is my prayer and hope that this project and the sermons series that came from it will move this ministry to greater health and growth in Christ. There is nothing more important than for people to know if they are in Christ or not. For the believer, this is a life-long joyful journey to discover the implications, demands, and as Christ promised in John 15:11, the deep and abiding joy of Christ. May all God's people know this joy.

APPENDIX 1

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST AND APPLICATION SURVEY

This survey was given as a pre- and a post-test. The purpose of the survey was to assess the current comprehension of the believer's union with Christ and its implications for biblical community among the adults of Kennerly Road Baptist Church. This survey was used as a post-test to measure an increase in understanding of and the application of the doctrine following the instruction phase. The post-test differed in asking participants to indicate whether they completed the pre-test and had attended the required sessions in person or virtually.

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST
AND APPLICATION SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

Kennerly Road Baptist Church is centered on the three core values of Word, Worship, and Community. Each of these is critical to the health of our church. This series on the doctrine of the believer's union with Christ will seek to clearly communicate how this relates to biblical community.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your understanding of the doctrine of the believer's union with Christ and how that impacts biblical community. This research is being conducted by Stephen Johns for purposes of project research. In this research, you will be asked to complete the pre-test, attend eight sessions in person or virtually, and complete the post-test. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Date: _____

In order for the results to remain anonymous we ask that you use the indicated box to assign yourself a four-digit code that is unique to you (*please do not use a code like 1234*). Use a code that is easily remembered so that you can utilize the same code for your post-test so that results can be compared.

4-digit code: _____

Member of Kennerly Road Baptist Church: Yes _____ No _____

Pre-Test _____ **Post-Test** _____

If taking this survey as the Post-Test:

I have attended in person or through video _____ sessions

(Please indicate the number of sessions attended)

Directions: Please mark your answer. The statements can be marked indicating your opinion using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree
D = disagree
DS = disagree somewhat
AS = agree somewhat
A = agree
SA = strongly agree

1. I discussed the doctrine of union with Christ with other Christians in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. The doctrine of union with Christ has influenced my understanding of who I am in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. It is important for a Christian to know their spiritual gifts.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. I can list my spiritual gifts.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I have used my spiritual gifts at KRBC in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. I have gathered with other members of KRBC outside of a regularly scheduled service in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. I have served members of KRBC in a way that cost me time in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I have served members of KRBC in a way that sacrificially cost me money in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I have helped KRBC establish a stronger community in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. Sermons at KRBC have helped me to understand who I am in Christ in the past year.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. In the past month I have had conversations with another member of KRBC that have helped me spiritually.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I have expressed gratitude to another member of KRBC for how they have shown me Christ in the past month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST AND APPLICATION PRE-SERIES SURVEY SUMMARY RESULTS

This appendix provides a summary of results of the pre-series survey given to the membership of KRBC. The table summarizes the combined results of all twenty-five respondents. The responses helped frame the curriculum of the eight sessions taught on union with Christ.

Table A1. Summary of the pre-series Understanding Union with Christ and Application survey results

Survey Statement	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
1	3.13	3.0	1.62
2	4.08	4.5	1.44
3	5.58	6.0	0.58
4	4.67	5.0	1.13
5	4.75	5.0	1.15
6	5.38	5.5	0.71
7	4.92	5.0	1.25
8	4.25	4.5	1.67
9	4.33	4.0	1.37
10	5.50	6.0	0.72
11	5.17	6.0	1.20
12	4.58	5.0	1.64

APPENDIX 3

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST AND APPLICATION PRE-SERIES INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

This appendix details the mean, median, and standard deviation of the responses by individuals who completed the pre-series survey. There were thirty-six adult members at the time of the implementation of the project and twenty-five of them completed the pre-series survey.

Table A2. Individual responses to the pre-series survey by pin number with calculated mean and median results

PIN	Member	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Mean	Median
5677	Y	3	3	5	2	3	6	4	1	2	5	6	5	3.75	3.5
1515	Y	3	4	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	4	5.25	6.0
1212	Y	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	5.75	6.0
252	Y	1	4	5	5	5	6	6	2	5	6	2	2	4.08	5.0
1600	Y	3	3	6	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	6	5	5.08	5.0
2304	Y	2	2	6	4	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	5.08	6.0
1221	Y	2	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	6	6	6	5.25	6.0
9509	Y	2	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	2	3	4	2	3.75	4.0
5585	Y	3	2	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	5.08	6.0
314	Y	6	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	4	5	5	6	5.42	5.5
1206	Y	6	6	6	5	4	5	2	2	2	6	6	6	4.67	5.5
7523	Y	1	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	4	5	4	2	4.67	5.0
1017	Y	1	1	6	6	4	5	2	2	6	6	6	6	4.25	5.5
310	Y	3	4	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	5	5	6	5.25	5.5
1814	Y	2	2	6	4	4	5	5	3	3	6	5	5	4.17	4.5
520	Y	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	4.75	5.0
1947	Y	5	5	6	4	4	6	5	4	5	6	6	5	5.08	5.0
1846	Y	5	5	5	4	4	6	4	4	4	6	6	6	4.92	5.0
5183	Y	1	5	6	5	5	5	6	5	5	6	2	2	4.42	5.0
127	Y	4	6	6	6	5	4	4	4	4	6	6	6	5.08	5.5
1927	Y	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.00	5.0
7839	Y	4	4	6	3	4	6	4	4	4	6	6	6	4.75	4.0
8226	Y	2	4	5	2	1	4	3	2	4	5	4	2	3.17	3.5
1758	Y	2	2	5	5	5	5	5	2	4	5	6	2	4.00	5.0
8122	Y	4	6	6	6	6	4	5	5	5	6	5	4	5.17	5.0
Mean		3.20	4.10	5.60	4.80	5.00	5.45	5.10	4.55	4.45	5.55	5.30	4.85		
Median		3.00	4.50	6.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	6.00	6.00	5.00		

APPENDIX 4

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST AND APPLICATION POST-SERIES SURVEY SUMMARY RESULTS AND COMPARISON

This appendix provides a summary of the results of the post-series survey given to the membership of KRBC. The table summarizes the combined results of the twenty respondents and compares the median and mean scores of the pre- and post-series surveys.

Table A3. Comparison summary of results of the pre- and post-series administration of the Understanding Union with Christ and Application survey

Survey Statement	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Pre-Test Median	Post-Test Median
1	3.13	5.05	3.0	5
2	4.08	5.70	4.5	6
3	5.58	5.85	6.0	6
4	4.67	5.30	5.0	5
5	4.75	5.60	5.0	6
6	5.38	5.75	5.5	6
7	4.92	5.50	5.0	6
8	4.25	4.80	4.5	5
9	4.33	5.20	4.0	5
10	5.5	5.95	6.0	5
11	5.17	5.60	6.0	6
12	4.58	5.20	5.0	6

APPENDIX 5

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST AND APPLICATION POST-SERIES SURVEY INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

This appendix provides the results of the post-series survey given to participants in the eight-session series to form a basis for comparison to the pre-series survey to evaluate statistical change in the participants. In accordance with the third goal of the project, only the results of those who had completed the pre-test and attended at least six of the eight sessions are included.

Table A4. Individual responses to the post-series survey by pin number indicating sessions attended with calculated mean and median results

PIN	Member	Sess. Att.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Mean	Median
5677	Y	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	5.67	6
1515	Y	8	3	5	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	4	5.25	6
1212	Y	8	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	5.75	6
252	Y	8	1	5	5	5	6	6	2	2	5	6	2	2	3.92	5
1600	Y	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5.83	6
2304	Y	8	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	5.33	5
1221	Y	8	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	5.75	6
9509	Y	8	5	5	6	5	5	6	6	2	4	6	6	5	5.08	5
5585	Y	8	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5.83	6
314	Y	8	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	2	6	6	5	6	5.42	6
7523	Y	7	6	6	6	5	5	4	5	5	6	6	6	6	5.42	6
1017	Y	8	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	5.50	6
310	Y	8	6	5	6	5	5	6	5	4	5	6	5	2	5.83	6
1814	Y	8	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5.00	5
520	Y	7	4	6	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	5.92	6
1947	Y	7	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5.50	6
1846	Y	7	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	6	6	5	5.67	6
127	Y	6	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5.25	5
7839	Y	8	3	5	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	4	5.50	6
8122	Y	8	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5.75	6
Mean			5.05	5.70	5.85	5.30	5.60	5.75	5.50	4.80	5.20	5.95	5.60	5.20		
Median			5.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00		

APPENDIX 6

T-TEST RESULTS FOR COMPARISON BETWEEN PRE- AND POST- SERIES SURVEY

This appendix provides the paired samples statistics and *t*-test results of the comparison between the pre- and post-surveys of members of KRBC that fell within the research methodology of the project.

Table A5. Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test	4.829	20	.555	.12424
Post-Test	5.458	20	.447	.10005

Table A6. Paired samples test

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i>	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Before-After	-.629	.522	.116	-5.392	<.001	<.001

APPENDIX 7

LESSON EVALUATION RUBRIC

This rubric was used by the expert panel to evaluate the eight lessons on the believer's union with Christ.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Lesson Evaluation Rubric					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the lessons sufficiently cover each issue they are designed to address.					
The lessons sufficiently cover the critical texts regarding union with Christ.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The lessons clearly advance an understanding of the believer's union with Christ.					
The lessons clearly and accurately communicate how to live out the doctrine of the union with Christ in the biblical community.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 8

LESSON RUBRIC EVALUATION RESPONSE

This appendix includes a table of the compilation of results from the expert panel of curriculum reviewers for the eight-session teaching series presented at KRBC.

Table A7. Curriculum evaluation based on four evaluators, 32 evaluations, and eight lessons for a total of 128 possible points per lesson

Curriculum Evaluation Totals						
Per Lesson						
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary						
Lesson #	1	2	3	4	Pts. Possible 128	% Earned
Lesson 1			11	21	117	91.40%
Lesson 2			6	26	122	95.31%
Lesson 3			4	28	124	96.88%
Lesson 4			3	29	125	97.66%
Lesson 5			4	28	124	96.88%
Lesson 6			2	30	126	98.43%
Lesson 7			3	29	125	97.66%
Lesson 8			5	27	123	96.09%
Mean			4.75	27	123.25	96.29%

APPENDIX 9
PROJECT TEACHING SERIES

This appendix contains the manuscript versions of each of the eight sessions for the teaching series of the project. Where students were provided a handout, it follows the lesson for that week. This eight-session series taught the congregation of Kennerly Road Baptist Church on the doctrine of union with Christ with specific emphases on its application to living in community. Union with Christ was defined as the spiritual reality that every believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them. It is my hope that this series served the listeners in advancing their understanding of this vital topic and that their union with Christ has become an ongoing way of thinking about their identity.

Lesson 1 Overview: Week 1 will focus on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Centered on Romans 6:1-5, the lesson will establish the spiritual reality of Union with Christ as an expression of spiritual reality for the Believer. A definition of Union with Christ will close this lesson.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson my students will be able to define Union with Christ and begin to understand its implications to their identity.

“Identity in Christ” Romans 6:1-5

Introduction:

How do you want to be remembered? How do you want to be known right now? A caregiver? A leader? A businessperson? Successful? Healthy? Mom or Dad? Husband or Wife? Single? Free? An American? I want you to hold that in your mind because this morning we will encounter a text that is calling us away from thinking of ourselves in these ways.

Why is Herod willing to order the slaughter of the innocents? Because he is King and not some kid in Bethlehem. Why are the Priests, Sanhedrin, Scribes, Pharisees, Zealots, and sell outs to Rome, all intense political rivals and enemies willing to conspire together to kill Jesus? Because He threatened their identity as the righteous ones and as the teachers and the leaders. Why is Judas willing to betray Jesus for silver? Because it furthered his identity as a wealthy man, the amount he had been stealing from the purse was not enough.

What about us? Why are women without children treated as second class citizens while those with children make life all about their status as a mom? Because their identity is that they brought life into the world. Why do we resent serving others in love and kindness while expecting to be served with love and kindness? Because our identity demands service. Why do people give themselves to their careers instead of loving and serving others? Because their identity is in respect, achievable goals, and a way to measure that they have achieved something.

We are in an identity crisis and Paul knows that if there is going to be any hope of lasting change in our lives we must be transformed in how we think about who we are. This is where true change begins. Being justified by Christ through grace and faith in Christ alone and then living out the reality of that new found identity. Jesus put it this way. **Luke 9:23-25** “**23** And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

BIG IDEA: There is no greater identity question than if I am in Christ or not.

I. Does it Really Matter?

A. Definitions Matter

- Rightly defining terms is the only way to have a meaningful conversation about a subject. George Bernard Shaw said, "Britain and America are two nations divided by a common language." If you go outside in just your pants in Britain it would be embarrassing because that means underwear to them, you'd have to also put on your trousers. In Britain, braces are for holding up pants not putting on teeth, a trolley here is public transportation while in Britain it is a grocery cart, or buggy depending on where you grew up in the States. One of the more serious obstacles in our Christian culture is the importance of theological words and their definitions. What do we mean by sanctification, regeneration, conversion, community, or the gospel? The words are important, and a common meaning is critical for them to have power.
- The term Union with Christ is one of those terms that needs specific defining. It needs this for our understanding but also for its power. It is the most foundational way that Paul describes the saved condition of the Believer using the term "in Christ." It is used by Paul to describe the spiritual reality of the Believer, the way the Believer is to think about the struggle with sin, how the Believer relates to other Christians, how the Believer relates to the lost, and how the Believer thinks about themselves.

Union with Christ is at the very core of the identity of the Believer. Understanding our Union with Christ frames a tremendous defense against a warped sense of self.

B. Comparisons Matter

- If we want to understand an idea, it is common for us to use comparisons to wrap our minds around that idea. God does this a lot in the Bible. Heart of flesh vs. heart of stone: Ezek 36:26 and Col 3:1 (Old vs. New Affections), Dead but now alive: Eph 2:1-9 (Old works vs. Good works), Old versus New way of thinking: Eph 4:17—32 (Old mindset vs. learned in Christ).
- Each of these teaches an old vs. new state but also a new way of living every day. Where does Union with Christ fit into this way of understanding the new state and ongoing life of the Believer? We must understand the contrast that Paul establishes for us between being 'in Adam' or 'in Christ' to answer this critical question. And this is what Paul is doing in Romans.

II. In Adam

The lost are understood biblically as being 'in Adam.' **Rom 5:12—14**
"12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world

before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”

This ‘in Adam’ state summarizes all that is entailed in the lost man’s condition (Rom 3:23; 5:12). They are corrupted in their thinking, in their desires, in their actions, and in their destination.

To be in Adam is to be in our sinful state. It is a way of communicating spiritual condition so it could stand with other statements about a person’s lostness. So, we could use any of these questions: Are you converted, are you lost, are you in sin, are you alive spiritually, are you regenerated, or are you in Adam?

We can think of sin in the life of a person in three ways. There is the presence of sin, the power of sin, and the punishment of sin. For true deliverance to take place for any person they would need freedom from all three of these. To be in Adam is to be in the presence of sin, under the power of sin, and deserving the punishment of sin.

III. In Christ

Here we have this stunning contrast then. The ‘in Christ’ state summarizes the deliverance of the Believer in their minds, their desires, their actions, and their destination. This is a confirmed state of being so that either a person is in Adam, or they are now in Christ. However, it is also being reflected in a progressive way through sanctification. Paul uses this understanding to great effect in Romans 6—8 where he teaches on the state of being in Christ and its impact on the daily sanctification process of every Believer.

A. Who I am Matters (6:1)

- Prisoners may be free but unless they are freed from their institutionalized mindset, are they really free? This can be seen in the book and film Shawshank Redemption. One character in the book, Brooks, has spent 50 years in prison before being release. He is free but 50 years of being told when to get up, go to bed, what to eat, where to sleep, and so on have made it impossible for him to live in true freedom and return to his old life. Freedom becomes its own bondage, and he takes his own life. Another character, Red, who spent 40 years in prison only overcomes his mindset by pursuing a completely new life and identity. How we think about who we are can drive what we do. It matters in life and it matters specifically to Paul.
- This new reality is contextually in a conversation about sanctification. Our position in Christ is key to a pure and holy life. Who we are matters in how we live. But Paul’s point is that understanding who we are matters. Romans 6:1 is in response to Paul’s closing statements in chapter 5. In Adam, sin rules but in Christ, grace must now rule. Righteousness through grace is the life of those who are now in Christ. It is an identity issue.

B. Am I Dead or Alive? (6:2-3)

- The difference between death and life could not be more obvious. The people around Jesus are concerned with the effects of death on Lazarus when Jesus tells them to open the grave. “He will stink by now.” The valley of dry bones is transformed into a valley of life when the Spirit moves. The difference between Friday and Sunday morning of resurrection could not be clearer.
- How do we know that Jesus died? (Testimony of Roman guards who are experts at killing and death, water and blood from the side of Christ, preparation of the body, Roman law requirements before the body was released, etc.)
- This is not a mind over matter issue, it is a radical change that occurs at salvation. Sitting around playing Zen thinking that suffering isn't real doesn't make it true. All the positive thoughts in the world won't raise a dead person. Paul is teaching us that an actual transformation happens in our salvation that moves us from death to life.
- Verse 3 illustrates this reality. Baptized means ‘immersed in.’ As good Baptists we get this reality that baptism is being put into a body of water. It is total immersion. Every Believer has been baptized, ‘put into’ Christ’s death. So, we died with Jesus.

The reality of the death of Christ is applied to sin in the life of the Believer. Just like Jesus died physically, we died with Him spiritually to sin.

C. Living in Reality (6:4-5)

- If we think of the effects of sin in the life of a person, we can boil it down to three key aspects we talked about earlier. There is the punishment for sin, the power of sin, and the presence of sin.
 1. Deliverance from the punishment of sin: Rom 6:23, 8:1—2. For Christ, the cross finishes and there is no more wrath, pain, or suffering for Christ. As people in Christ, believers will never experience the wrath of God, we have been delivered from the punishment of sin.
 2. Deliverance from the power of sin: Rom 6:6. Christ withstood temptation and lived perfect and holy. He subjected Himself to Satan’s attempts to prove His perfection. Sin has no power over Him. Because we are raised with Christ, and this is Paul’s big point in Romans 6-8, we are no longer under the power of sin to be a slave to our desires, our flesh, or Satan or this world.
 3. Deliverance from the presence of sin: Rev 21:4. Christ is resurrected and one day will destroy all sin. One day, we also will be raised to new life and be forever freed from even the presence of sin.

IV. Union with Christ

Paul's use of 'in Christ.' Paul uses this phrase 164 times in his writings. It is the central way that he describes this new state of the Believer. Our old self has been devastated by the logging truck of Christ's grace. Union with Christ is the doctrine that describes this new reality.

The extent of Union with Christ: Paul uses the term to communicate about the Believer's relationship with God (Rom 3:24), their standing before God (Rom 8:1), their connection to other Believers (Rom 12:5), their new state (2 Cor 5:17), the source of our reception of God's promises (Gal 3:14), their adoption as sons and daughters (Gal 3:26), and their current spiritual position (Eph 2:6). This is just to name a few but it demonstrates the comprehensive nature, the broad horizon, and every aspect of our lives extent of what it is to be in Union with Christ. That is the extent but what does it look like?

It looks like this poem by A.S. Wilson

Not merely in the words you say,
Not only in your deeds confessed,
But in the most unconscious way
Is Christ expressed.
For me 'twas not the truth you taught
To you so clear, to me still dim
But when you came to me you brought
A sense of Him.
And from your eyes He beckons me,
And from your heart His love is shed,
Til I lose sight of you and see
The Christ instead.

Theologian Wayne Grudem describes it this way; "Union with Christ is a phrase used to summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ, through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation. These relationships include the fact that we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ."

Theologian John Stott describes a person who is in Christ in this way; "They dwell in him and he dwells in them. He is the source of their life and it shows in everything they do."

For this series we will condense this from a purely theological definition to this:

Union with Christ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them.

Conclusion:

Who are you really? Besides answers like a Mom or Dad, Retiree, Single, Married, Child, Teen, Adult, Educated, hardworking, nothing matters more than if you are in Christ or not. Who you are matters. How you think about who you are matters almost just as much. Are you in Christ or not?

What should you do with this reminder or new information? First, I want to call on you to start thinking this way. Second, there is no better way to do that than to talk to others about it. Maybe think of it this way. If my son said he is a lacrosse player and you asked all that meant, he'd say a lot about conditioning, different sticks, positions, rules of the game, history playing, and more. If you said you were a Clemson fan and I asked what that meant, you'd tell me. Now, ask what it means to be "in Christ" and what they feel like, looks like, and sounds like. What makes that distinctively different to you?

There is no greater identity question than if I am in Christ or not.

Lesson 2 Overview: Week 2 will seek to extend the thinking of the reality of Union with Christ from a spiritual position to a practical reality. Exegesis of Rom 6:5—14 will provide the scriptural support for how this thinking should impact sanctification decisions.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson my students will be able to delineate the difference between the spiritual and practical aspects of Union with Christ.

Truth for Daily Living Romans 6:5-14

Introduction:

It is common to think of several of Paul’s epistles beginning with doctrinal truth and then moving to practical application of the doctrines presented. It is a not-so-subtle reminder that before we can put something into practice, we must have the right information.

In preparing to teach my teenagers to drive, we had multiple conversations about mirrors, rules of the road, how a car works, and the power of brakes over gas before we ever got into the car. However, if we never move from the theoretical to the practical, we must ask how valuable the information is for us. I am sure all of us at some point sat in a middle or high school or even college class and asked, “what will I ever use this for so why it matters to learn?”

What if someone asked that about union with Christ? Does that make them weak, immature, or wrong? Nope. It very well may mean they are being honest and open. No offense here. Let’s ask it together. What practical use is there in me understanding union with Christ?

“I need help in overcoming sin. I need help in how to do singleness, parenting, marriage, resolve conflict, make financial decisions, choose a career, and handle my obnoxious neighbor Steve.”

Well, you are asking about actions in each of those. But what if I said before you can overcome sin, do singleness, parenting, marriage, resolve conflict, make financial decisions, choose a career, and handle your obnoxious neighbor you need to understand sin, how to steward life, how to relate to others, and how to put what you know into practice? If you are learning to drive, bake, or do anything, you need both the information and the practice.

If you aim at nothing you miss every time. So, we are aiming this week at a very specific target. We want to know the difference between the spiritual and practical parts of union with Christ. This week we want to move from, in this case theological and not just theoretical, to the practical and everyday reality of union with Christ.

Big Idea: Union with Christ is a spiritual truth that we need to and can connect to our daily struggles.

I. Truth Declared (6:5)

Here are some common terms or phrases you may have heard people use to invite someone to be saved: repent and believe, ask Jesus into your heart, pray the ‘sinner’s prayer,’ and submit to the lordship of Christ. Now each of these certainly has been used and God can use and does use our broken communication of the Gospel to save people so we aren’t evaluating the best of these this morning, but we do want to ask; what are some theological truths that each of these phrases are emphasizing?

Repent and Believe: Emphasizes the words of Christ and the Apostles in their gospel appeals (Ex: Mk 1:15, Matt 4:17, Acts 2:38).

Pray the sinner’s prayer: The need to confess sin and call out to God for salvation (Ex: Rom 10:9).

Submit to the lordship of Christ: That salvation is also discipleship and following Christ (Ex: Matt 16:24).

Let’s look back at what Paul is saying here about our salvation in Romans 6:5. What theological truth is being emphasized in this statement about salvation? That salvation is union with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What is important about each of those two truths that it is union with the death and resurrection? Death is important because God poured His wrath for our sins on Christ, and He therefore paid for our sins with His life. Resurrection is important because it shows God accepted the payment for sin and He is alive, and we are alive in His righteousness.

Audience Ask: Okay, then let’s brainstorm for a minute. If we were going to make that vital truth an emphasis in a call to salvation, how might we say it? (*Ex: Come and be made one with Christ’s righteous life, death for sin, and new life in holiness. If you die with Christ, you are raised with Christ.*)

A critical truth for Paul to the Romans is that we are united with, made one with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Audience Ask: Prediction Moment: Without looking at the text, where do you think Paul might go with this next?

II. Truth Remembered (6:5-11)

Let’s play a little mind game for a moment. What did you have to eat yesterday? Where is somewhere you went other than home last week? What day did you go there? Okay, now, what did I have to eat yesterday? Where is somewhere I went other than my home or church last week? What day did I go there? Let’s press it a bit further. What did the President eat yesterday? Where did he go other than home? It is one thing to struggle to remember what has happened in our lives, but it is impossible for you to remember what happened in my life or certainly impossible in the case of the President? Why? Because you can’t remember what you don’t know.

Here is the answer to where Paul will go with this next. Before he can apply this vital truth of the Believer being united with the death and resurrection of Christ practically, he has to make sure we know what we need to remember. This is what the

next several verses are doing. They are unpacking the information bound up in the truth of being united with Christ.

Let's create a table here to better help us understand these truths of united in death and resurrection and their connection to one another.

Unpacking the Truth of Union with Christ	
United in His death	United in His resurrection
Death ends 'this body' of sin How? Ill: Slavery	Resurrection brings new life. Physical death would end any opportunity to follow or serve God here. We are resurrected to follow and serve. To be united in resurrection is to be united in service to God.
Ill: Slavery is about permanent power and control (6, 9 dominion, 12 reign)	Resurrection signals freedom. Christ didn't stay dead but rose from the dead to resurrection life. We are free from the bondage of sin. (8)
Ill: Physical death ends slavery (vs. 6)	Resurrection is a new permanent life. Having died, He cannot die again and so is forever free to live. It is a permanent spiritual reality. (9-10)
Death frees from the power and control of sin (6 brought to nothing, 7 set free)	This is a spiritual state (11). To be united with Christ in His resurrection is to be set free to live in Christ.
So . . . to be united with the death of Christ is to be freed from the power and control of sin.	This has practical ramifications (12). The life that Christ lives, and we are to live with Him, is a life lived to God.

Paul has tackled the two categories of union with Christ in our salvation. He has talked about the death of Christ and the resurrected life of Christ. He has said that this is the truth for the Believer, and he has said we 'know' the implications of this truth. The struggle for most of us in different areas is the distance between what we know and what we do. Or the distance between what we know and what we feel.

Paul will actually describe this disconnect for the Christian in Romans 7. He knows what to do but struggles doing it and he knows what not to do but keeps on doing it. Paul is trying to help all of us out of the ditch of that kind of lifestyle. The true way of living here is with a heavenly mindset, to think about life the way God thinks about life because there is nothing truer than the truth of God.

So, verse 11 says this to us. Rom 6:11 "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." How can we 'consider' this to be the truth? It might help to know that the word Paul uses here emphasizes crediting something or writing it down. It is to think about and meditate on these truths. It is to find ways to

remember them daily. I say a daily basis because we live every day, we fight our flesh every day, and we are called every day to live out this new life in Christ.

What are some ways you could incorporate into your morning routine reminders of this truth? (Pray this with children on the way to school “God thank you that we don’t have to live controlled by sin because Jesus conquered sin for us,” sticky note on bathroom mirror “You are dead to sin and alive in Christ so live out that reality,” note on coffee maker, phone reminder, write it as a simple prayer to remember and tape it to your dashboard, etc.

III. A Truth Connected (6:12-14)

Union with Christ is immensely practical. Paul talks about the Believer not yielding their bodies as instruments to work unrighteousness but to work righteousness. We can think of these physical bodies then as tools in one sense to do the work that God has called us to do. The word Paul is using though could also be used to describe a weapon. This feels a lot more like my life, particularly when I sin.

One of the best examples of this in the Bible is our speech. Frequently the Bible uses our words to reveal our hearts. We could even say it like this: “Our words express whether we are living out the reality of death or life in Christ.” Proverbs talks a lot about our words and tongues being weapons like swords, arrows, and spears. James addresses its destructive power like a flame that starts a forest fire. When we sin, damage happens. There is damage to our relationship with God and others and to ourselves. Paul is telling us that the powerful truth of our union with Christ plays a critical role in these bodies becoming powerful weapons for the good of God.

What is the critical aspect of this reality in verse 14? That we are no longer under the power of sin but are now under grace.

What does this look like in real time? Let’s listen to this devotional by John Piper as he discusses how grace is not just pardon but also power over sin.
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/grace-is-pardon-and-power>

I believe the first greatest application of this in your life would be for you to meditate on this reality and how it can apply practically to your life. So, we are going to give ourselves 5-7 minutes here to think through this reality in our lives in a directed way.

You can go back to that list I gave at the start. (Overcome sin, do singleness, parenting, marriage, resolve conflict, make financial decisions, choose a career, and handle your obnoxious neighbor) Or I want to encourage you to think of an area of sin in your life. It could be habitual, or a flesh bent or sin that clings to you (Lust, anger, gluttony, laziness, apathy, bitterness, etc.) How is this sin exercising power over you and how is it lying to you against this truth we have been learning this morning. At the close of our time, we will be reminded of the definition of union with Christ.

Union with Christ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them.

We now have learned that this is true in being crucified and resurrected with Christ and this is truth is at the very center of the ability of the Believer to walk in righteousness and not under the rule of sin.

Lesson 3 Overview: Week 3 will transition to Rom 12:1—2 and help the students to understand how Paul intends Union with Christ to be an ongoing training of the Believer’s mind. Connections will be made between the sacrifice of Christ and the daily sacrificial worship of the Believer.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson my students will learn how to link the spiritual reality of Union with Christ with a daily approach to life.

Our Sacrifice Romans 12:1-2

Introduction:

We are going to start this class with a little bit of quiz work. At the top of your sheet, you will find our working definition of union with Christ. I’ve left some of the words in there to help you out but let’s see how well you can do with remembering what we have been learning so far. Below that you will find three prompts for you to write a sentence or two in response. Each of these will help you with retaining information that we have been learning with the goal of making it a part of your daily life. I know that quizzes are not supposed to happen in the life of the church and most of us aren’t used to working on memory things apart from AWANA or a similar program. But we want to do this because science has proven that this can really help us with retention and as we learned last week, we can’t apply what we don’t know and remember.

Student Quiz:

Union with Christ is the spiritual _____ that a Believer is _____ Christ, Christ is _____ them, and the controlling reality of every _____ in their _____ is to be _____ coming out of them.

One tool I think would be helpful to remind my heart every day of my union with the death and resurrection of Christ:

Why is it important that I have the resurrection power of Christ at work in me to help me grow and change:

One area of my life where I can see a deep need for change to be like Christ and why:

Arguably the best trained special forces in the world are the Navy SEALs. They run into danger, they are highly trained marksman and skilled operators able to control their adrenaline rush, fear, and confusion in battles to achieve victory. They seem like supermen to most of the rest of us ordinary people. How are they so fast, so skilled, and so in control? Imagine them infiltrating a plane and rescuing a hostage. With seconds to spare before a hostage is killed, what do they do? Well, they have a saying. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast. How is that possible? They are relying on the same thing that enables a pianist to use different hands at different spots on the keyboard at the same time, the same theory that enables you to type, drive, or cook a favorite recipe. They build muscle memory over repeated exercises that demand perfection. When we are working with truths that need to be in our minds, repetition will help us as we seek to build a kind of muscle memory of truth.

Specifically, how does the Christian wrestling with habitual sin experience union with Christ in a way that helps change them? How does a stay-at-home mom live in the daily reality of Christ’s sacrificial worship? How about the person battling sickness? The man at work? The lady juggling career and marriage? The retired saint with lots of time?

Big Idea: Union with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is seen in our daily worship.

I. Normal Worship (12:1)

What is a normal vs. an extravagant gift? What is the most extravagant gift you have ever been given? A while back for Father's Day I opened a gift from one of my sons and I was absolutely blown away by what I saw. He had given me the LEGO version of a 67 Shelby Mustang. It was thousands of pieces and cost well over a hundred dollars. He knows I love cars, love to fix things, and thought it was the perfect blending of something he loves, LEGO's, something I love, and something we could do together. Extravagant especially for a 15-year-old without a job! Or I think of my wife giving me an early edition of Les Miserables by Victor Hugo or my family giving me a framed original page from Spurgeon's sermon notes. I have original art pieces in my office from my daughter and from Daniel Cummins. I have a crown of thorns woven by Nick Drociuk hanging in my office. Extravagant because of cost, sure sometimes. Some are extravagant because of the effort to find them and the personal connection. So, what is it that makes gifts extravagant and what makes them normal?

In the King James Version, it translates that word we have in the ESV as spiritual with the word reasonable. A lot of ESV bibles even have a note there that says 'rational' service. We could also use words like expected, normal, logical, or wise. They are all getting at the same reality that Believers normally would present their bodies as living sacrifices.

How does that tie into what we were learning last week from Rom 6:12—14? (Yielding our bodies as instruments / weapons of righteousness is the normal and expected behavior of every Christian)

Normative worship is an expected, understood, reasonable expression of praise to God.

Sacrifice is a weighted term that calls forward images of costliness, blood, smoke, and worship. It certainly points to the work of the cross to which the entire Old Testament pointed. But the sacrifice of our own lives is normal? That seems extravagant. How do we understand that?

II. Extravagant Worship

Sacrifice is about value and worth. It is giving up something precious as a demonstration of the greater value in the worship of God. Understanding this in relation to believers' lives is what Paul is attempting to lead them to understand. Approaching life as a sacrifice toward Christ is seen on a few occasions in the Gospels. The rebuke of Christ toward Martha for not understanding the better thing of being with Him demonstrates a greater worth in Christ than even service (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus capitalizes on this theme of worth and sacrifice in His parables of the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great price (Matt 13:44-46), so He is worth far more than any treasure here. A stunning image of sacrificial worship is on display in the account of the woman washing the feet of Jesus in Simon's home (Mark 14:3-9). But let's look at one text a little closer in Luke 7:40-50. It is the famous story where Jesus is sitting at a Pharisee's house and a prostitute comes in and weeps on Jesus's feet and anoints them with expensive ointment. The Pharisee is shocked by this extravagance so Jesus tells this parable.

Lk 7:40—48 “40 And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” 44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” 48 And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The basics of the story are plain without us diving too deep this morning. Let’s give a one sentence summary. *Worship that seems extravagant to others is normal to the one driven by grateful love.*

What can we safely say then about people who would think that this is extravagant worship? What can we safely say about our own hearts when we read Rom 12:1 and hear that the sacrifice of our entire body is reasonable, normal, logical, and expected? *The costliness which would otherwise seem extravagant is made normal considering it is in response to so large a gift from God.*

III. A New Reality (12:2)

First, conformity here is to be pressed into the mold of the world. An old Chinese proverb says “If you want to know what the water is like, don’t ask the fish.” We are constantly in the world and so it is astoundingly difficult for us to recognize its influence, presence, and absolute pervasiveness of everything. Over the years different branches of Christianity have attempted to address this reality. Some generalized attempts have been total immersion. It is a philosophy that says you must be like them to win them. There is a grain of truth here with Paul advocating being like a Jew to the Jews and a Roman to the Romans. Another approach is Monasticism where the world is the problem and various forms of hermitage living is the answer for righteousness. Removal is the answer whether individually or as an organization. There is the grain of truth here where Heaven will be a place of total removal from the world and its sinfulness. A third general approach has been to transform them. There is truth here as well where there is not one inch of the globe where God has not declared “Mine” as Kuyper said. So, there is a complexity here. But what about you and I tomorrow and the day after? How do we see the world rightly and resist its conforming power? We do this through Daily mind transformation and lifelong discerning testing.

Daily mind transformation. Last week we talked about ways to remind ourselves of the fact that we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. If we think specifically of the need for sacrificial worship, what can we do to link that reality in the life of Christ with our everyday lives? To press this more; How does a stay-at-home mom live in the daily reality of Christ’s sacrificial worship? How about the person battling sickness? The man at work? The lady juggling career and marriage? The retired saint with lots of time? For that, we need to finish with a few key connections.

IV. Building Connections

A. Connection with Christ

– Romans 12 is 12 chapters in. Super shocking. But it is also well after something Paul says in 8:5-11 that is immensely important at this point. It is because we are in Christ that we can experience the transformation of our minds that leads to daily normal sacrificial worship. Rom 8:5-11 “5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

– **It is possible and normal for the Believer to experience a life-long transformation of their mind and life to match the thinking and actions of Jesus because Christ is *in them* and they are *in Christ*.**

B. Connection with Daily Life

– One of the ways that we can remember these truths best is seeing how they connect to our daily lives. When that happens and it becomes habit for us to think this way we will build a sort of spiritual muscle memory in our journey to becoming more like Jesus. Romans 12:2 takes us closer to meeting that need.

– Let’s put a chart in front of us that will help us to build some connections here over what we have been learning so far. On one side I have listed some of the basic truths we learned over the last few weeks concerning union with Christ and our thinking. On the other side, I have listed some of the truths we have been learning this week. I’d like for us to work for a few minutes here to build some connections. I’d like you to come up and draw a line from one side to one or more of the things listed on the right and just briefly say where you see the connections. If you aren’t comfortable walking up here, I can draw the lines for you.

Truths of Union with Christ	Daily Life
United with the death of Christ	Stay at home parent struggling with worth, value, boredom, or exhaustion
United with the resurrection of Christ	Too much time on my hands
Daily reminders of union with Christ	Habitual sin struggles
Instruments of Righteousness	Feeling relationally connected to Christ
Instruments of Sin	Initiating spiritual conversations
Slavery to sin	Habitual sin struggles
Struggles in sanctification	Serving others
Sacrificial Worship	Juggling career and marriage
Extravagant' worship and a sense of gratitude	Battling illness, financial hardship, relational strain
Daily worship	Stewarding money

- The hard work of applying union with Christ to our everyday life doesn't begin with changing what we do, it begins with changing how and what we think. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast though. Over time, this can become habit for each one of us. God is not frustrated with us in this process. He designed this process after all. On top of that, what we are learning is that real change in our lives is based upon truth about Christ, reminders of His work, encouragement in how we are in Him and He is in us, and the power for change is from Him and not in ourselves.

Union with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is seen in our daily worship.

Lesson 4 Overview: Week 4 will establish the link between Union with Christ and community. Using the body metaphors of Rom 12:3—4 and 1 Cor 12:12—31 the students will apply what they have learned about Union with Christ to their practical relationships in the church. Emphasis will be on the students need of others.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson my students will know that they need to view others in the church through the lenses of both of their Union with Christ.

Me to We: Community
Romans 12:3-4 & 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Introduction:

In recent years, a particular term has become common to describe a community. You can see it in these meme’s and in this quote. “Find your tribe and love them hard.”

Audience Ask: What are these getting at? (*The innate desire for a group to belong with. The sense that I am most comfortable with people like me. The reality that the people I am closest with may be those with similar hobbies, interests, careers, etc. and not my blood family. That part of happiness in life is tied to a sense of belonging.*)

What if this desire for belonging to a group that has been made more evident in recent years with tribe language is part of how we are made? In Genesis we find Adam and God and yet God makes it very clear to Adam that he is alone by showing him all the companions in the animal kingdom. The answer is not just God but the creation of community. Of course, we are not saying that God is not enough or that singleness forever relegates someone to be less than God’s created design. But we are noticing that God’s intended design was community. In the family but not just in the family. How can we know that? Because God created other institutions, communities by languages, entire nation communities, and the church is a covenant community.

Last week we gave you a fill in the blank definition for union with Christ. Let’s see how we do this week with that definition in one area.

Union with _____ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in _____, _____ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their lives is to be _____ coming out of them.

You may have noticed that what was left out this week was the word Christ. I want us to start this morning by thinking about the fact that we all long for a community because it is God’s design for us. But the worlds answer, and all too often the Christian’s answer, is to find a community where the one that is absent is the most important bond of community, Jesus Christ.

Big Idea: We need to learn to see other believers through lenses of our and their union with Christ.

I. Living in a Body: Part 1

Rom 12:3—5 “3 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. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

When Jesus begins to round up His disciples it is surprising whom He chooses for a few reasons. First, some of them are not well respected. Second, some of them are probably not well educated, not illiterate mind you but wise in craftsmanship or their careers but not necessarily academics. Third, they are very different from one another. In fact, they are so different that it would even seem dangerous. You have a Tax Collector and a Zealot. The Zealots were sworn to overthrow the Roman government and would assassinate Jews who were working for the Romans. The unifying bind was Jesus. But they would have had to come to see and appreciate this reality if there was any hope of their working together.

Paul tells us here in Romans that we should think of life in the community of the church like a body. If there is any hope in the body for it to work together, there must be a sense of mutual appreciation. But mutual appreciation flourishes best when we have a sense that we need others. That is the biggest take away from this section for us today. **We need others because we need Jesus and Jesus is coming out of them for and to us.**

How does the body metaphor from Paul drive us to that perspective of need? (*Eyes need hands, feet need legs, body needs organs, etc.*) What do we call someone who is missing part of their body? How do we think of them? (*As handicapped, disabled, and less than whole. I actually think it is wonderful to consider that this series will help us to not think of anyone handicapped or disabled as less but as God has wonderfully and fearfully made them. And if they are a believer, that their identity is not found in their physical being but as being in Christ!*)

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed which prevents discrimination based on disabilities. Most familiar to us is the requirements for accessibility to buildings and businesses and its impacts on employment. In the church circles I was in at the time I remember a fair amount of fear. What was this going to cost the church? Were they all going to have to put in elevators or chair lifts? Was this going to bankrupt the church? Was this a way for the liberals to destroy church by mounting lawsuits against religious organizations? Here is what I find interesting now. Where was the conversation about caring for the broken, hurting, and social outcasts because their bodies were less than whole? Here's the point. Our culture doesn't do brokenness well at all and resists accommodations for those that aren't whole. They stand out, their needs and flaws are obvious in many cases, and adjustments must be made. What is wonderful is that when this reality is embraced by Christians they provide a living illustration that none of us are actually whole, we all need others.

What is it like if the body of Christ isn't whole? (*Other organizations may step in to provide care because the church isn't, people may have to look outside of the church for quality teaching and discipleship, needs won't be met, etc.*)

We need to learn to see other believers through lenses of our and their union with Christ.

II. Barriers to Community

Predicative Task: What do you think Paul might identify as hindrances to community? (*I can have my emotional, friendship, spiritual, service needs met somewhere else. I have experienced past hurt in the church, so I want more freedom to choose my tribe., etc.*)

Let me give us two to work with. One from this text and one from its implications for all of us.

A. Pride of Life

- What is the most significant barrier to living in this reality of being a part of a body together? Paul boils it down in verse 3 to pride. It is an arrogant view of life.
- Rom 12:3a “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 . . .” Where could we see arrogance in the body of Christ? (*My spiritual gifts are more important, I am a better contributor, the church needs me, I can do that ministry better, I wish I served in this or that role, I’m not good enough to do anything, the church doesn’t need me, I don’t like the way so and so does that because I know or could do it better, etc.*)
- Paul places this idea of us all being a part of the body in the greater context of the verses we looked at last week together. We can safely say that in Rome, and it is still around today, is a resistance for the sacrifice necessary to be part of a healthy community. Unwilling to sacrifice their body as part of their reasonable worship and be a part of this body: Rom 12:1—5 “1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 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. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

B. Peculiarity of the Church

- The key essence of the body image here is unity amidst diversity. It is many parts all working together. Unfortunately, there are hurdles to us fully understanding this reality because it is so different from anything else we experience.
- Physician turned theologian D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones contrasts the unity of a train made up of individual cars and yet one train with the reality of the body of Christ. It is not the same idea and unhelpful to think of the church as many parts functioning together: “In the body, you have a vital relationship, an organic unity, which means that there is a living connection between the parts. It is not a kind of soldering or trying on but an inner unity, as Paul suggests in such a wonderful way in Eph 4:16 “from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”
- Our Pride and the peculiar nature of the church make understanding and applying these truths about union with Christ in our community high hurdles to overcome. Thinking that we need one another, and others need us and that it is less something to put on and more something to live out, is hard for us. So, we can go to our

second text this morning to have Paul help us there as well.

III. Living in a Body: Part 2

It is important that we understand that while union with Christ has everything to do with our salvation and personal journey of sanctification, this never happens in isolation. We learned that we are personally united with Christ in two key areas from Romans 6 a few weeks ago. What were those? We are united in His death and in His resurrection.

Paul presses this reality beyond us as individuals and into community. There are multiple ways the church is described in the New Testament. It is called a bride (Eph 5), a field (1 Cor 3), and a building (Eph 2) to just name a few. However, Paul calls it a body here. Why do you think that is? In part it is because Paul wants us to think of our union with the body of Christ both individually as well as in community. This body, the church, *is* the body of Christ.

A. Back to our Pride

- 1 Cor 12:12—13 “12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”
- Do you notice that Paul identifies the differences that they will struggle with in acting like a body? Here they are cultural, social, and financial. Here is what is interesting. Remember that the first significant hurdle we looked at was the pride inherent to all of us. Guess what all of these have in common? These all would fall under various ways of thinking of yourself as more or less than someone else. This is death to a body! He is helping us here in a very specific application way.

Audience Ask: Why is it important for you to receive and do ministry with people of a different culture, race, financial standing, and academic place, than you?

B. Back to our Peculiarity

- In 1 Cor 12:14-31 Paul gives an extended illustration of the body and its parts. Eyes, feet, ears, hands, and unmentionable parts all make an appearance for Paul to make a huge point. The church is like our bodies and we need each other to even exist as a body. An ear is not a body. An eye is not a body. But he lands the plane of this illustration in verses 27-31. 1 Cor 12:27—31 “27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”
- We need one another and we are each needed for the body of Christ to exist.

Spiritual gifts are direct expressions of Christ coming out of us through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus was a Jewish Carpenter, truly God and truly man. But for the world today to have any hope of truly seeing and experiencing Him they need, to borrow Paul's language, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, and from Galatians, men and women. They need and by 'they' I mean 'we' need to see Jesus and God intends for that to be the truth. How? Through first making us united in His death and His resurrection and second by making us part of His body putting Him on display.

We need to learn to see other believers through lenses of our and their union with Christ.

- Now, what do we do with this practically? Let me take you to two verses sandwiched between the illustration of the body and the introduction of spiritual gifts. **1 Corinthians 12:25–26** “**25** that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”
- If you are striving to maintain unity. If you are experiencing the joys and sorrows of life with one another, you are living out this reality. Interestingly, one of the lowest scoring statements on our pre-test was contributing to a strong community. How can you do that? This week, celebrate or weep with someone. Ask what victory or sorrow you can celebrate with or bear with them. Enter their world which is just living out the reality that you are in one body. Who is your tribe? Look around friends, it's the body of Christ.

Lesson 5 Overview: Week 5 will instruct the students on how Union with Christ is the basis of the Spiritual Gift or Gifts that each Believer possesses. It is Christ coming out of the Believer by the power of the Spirit. This will not seek to be comprehensive but instead focus on the purposes of the gifts in glorifying God and edifying one another. Emphasis will be made on how this is Christ actively being lived out within the community by committed Believers. Homework will ask the students to reflect on their own gifts and what would happen if those gifts didn't exist or were not being used in the church.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson my students will learn that Spiritual Gifts are a primary practical experience and expression of the Believer's Union with Christ and the need of this reality.

It's Time to See Christ Romans 12:3-8

3 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.

4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,

5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Introduction:

One of the tensions you may have felt in this class is the struggle of making a spiritual truth real to us daily. We have brainstormed a bit together on how to do this and I have given a few ideas along the way. We are now halfway through our series, and we want to pause for a few minutes this morning and remind ourselves of some realities that we have learned.

- What are some truths you never knew before this class?
- What are some truths you have been reminded of that have been helpful to you?
- Have you had any frustrations with connecting the concept of union with Christ to your daily life? What bothers you about that?
- Have you seen an increase in your appreciation for the importance of understanding union with Christ?
- Have any of you sought to be reminded of this reality daily? What have you done that you have found helpful?

This morning we are going to study a specific way that God has designed to help us live in the daily reality of our union with Christ. Remember that union with Christ is Him in us and us in Him. We see this in our salvation and sanctification, and it plays a major role in how we function as a Christian community.

One of the biggest fruits of the study on union with Christ has been this increasing awareness of connecting this theological reality to our daily lives is where the meat

exists, where the rubber meets the road, and where all this truth really matters. There are two ways I want to throw that out this morning. The first is our deep need to live in the awareness of the reality that for the believer, Christ is in us.

When my wife was expecting our first child, we had very different experiences to say the least. I heard heartbeats and saw the changes and looked at an ultrasound. But in many ways, it just didn't seem real to me. She on the other hand went through massive physical changes, lost sleep, got poked and prodded, and after a few months of pregnancy she could feel the baby moving and kicking. The reality of it all didn't come fully home for me until I saw what must have been a little foot or elbow poking in her belly. Suddenly, it was like "Whoa, this is real!" **We need something to make union with Christ real to us.**

Where is Jesus when bad things happen? Where is Jesus when suffering arrives? Where is Jesus in the good and the bad? We live in a world that longs to see the reality of Jesus. We live in a world that doubts the reality of the power of Jesus. We live in a world where the church has done and hidden a lot of terrible evil and those of us that are saved know that what needs to happen is for Jesus to be put on display and not really us. **We need something to make Christ real to the world around us.**

This morning we get to look at one of God's answers to these two needs of us experiencing the reality of our union with Christ and the need for Christ to made real to the world around us.

Big Idea: Spiritual Gifts are active demonstrations of the believer's union with Christ.

I. Spiritual Gifts: An Overview

Over the years we have spent a fair amount of time as a church studying spiritual gifts. Through sermons series, as we worked through Romans and 1 Corinthians, and a Sunday School series, we have covered this aspect of the Christian life in detail. This morning we won't do that again, but we will be reminded of a couple of key truths so that we can bring that knowledge into our understanding of union with Christ.

1) Basic Truths

- There are three texts in the New Testament that deal with Spiritual Gifts with a variety of lists: Rom 12:4-8, 1 Cor 12:4-11, and 1 Pet 4:10-11.
- Not all the original spiritual gifts are in operation today. There are some sign gifts like tongues and prophecy that have ceased to operate.
- Every Believer has at least one spiritual gift given by God (Rom 12:6—8).
- No Believer has all the spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6—8 and 1 Cor 12:27—31).
- Spiritual gifts play a vital role in the life of the church (1 Cor 12:27—31 and Eph 4:11—12).
- Spiritual gifts can be roughly grouped into the two categories of serving and speaking from 1 Pet 4:10-11.

Spiritual gifts are living demonstrations of the presence and power of God coming out of a person.

2) Purpose of the Gifts

- There is a two-fold purpose to spiritual gifts: 1 Cor 12:4—12 “4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

1. **To glorify God:** We need to remember that it is possible to use your spiritual gift in a way that is not about the glory of God. We can see this most clearly with how Paul is confronting the Corinthians over how they were abusing the gift of tongues in their worship services. Or you can use them in a way that glorifies God. We are told to use our gifts by faith under the power of the Spirit. They are not for us to consume but to put His glory on display.

Psalm 19:1 “The Heavens declare the glory of God.” God has written His glory into creation. The glory of God is the putting on display the beauty of his holiness. It is putting into visible form the utter delight of who He is. We see through a glass darkly now but then we will see face to face. Spiritual gifts are part of the shadowing effect of this darkened world that are pointing to a greater reality. God wants us to open our eyes to see Him and know His presence. The question is how the gifts glorify God?

In John 4 we see Jesus show mercy to this broken shell of a woman at Jacob’s well. We see Jesus teach her effectively with the truth. We see Jesus exhort her deeply with her own spiritual need. We see Jesus evangelize her with the gospel. We see Jesus lead her with instructions on what to do next. We see Jesus administrate His disciples to give Him the alone time needed for ministry to this lady. We see Jesus’s glory as His holiness is put on display in a beautiful way.

We make Jesus visible, we put the glory of God on display, when we use our gifts in a Spirit-filled, and faith-driven way.

2. **To edify others:** We need to remember that the gifts are not given primarily for our personal benefit, although there are benefits for sure! They are designed though to build up other Believers. While we see offices in Ephesians 4 we also recognize that in these areas there is some overlap of required gifting as well. These exist to build up others. **Eph 4:11—16** “11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the

stature of the fullness of Christ, **14** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **15** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Certainly, it would edify others just to see and experience Jesus coming out of us through our use of spiritual gifts. But there are even more practical ways we can think about building up, or edifying, others.

How is putting God’s glory on display using spiritual gifts actually edifying others though? That takes us all the way back to the introduction. We need something to make union with Christ real to us and the world needs something to make Christ real to them.

Spiritual Gifts are active demonstrations of the believer’s union with Christ.

II. Connecting Spiritual Gifts to Seeing Christ

A. Loving like Christ

- God says the gospel can be boiled down to loving God and loving others. We are told that if we don’t love then we aren’t saved. Well John makes this point even more directly in 1 Jn 4:7—9 “7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been borne of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”
- Loving others puts God on display in unique ways. In a world where Jesus has resurrected and is not visible to us, God intends for the world to see Him through the love of our lives. Well, when we remember that spiritual gifts are God’s empowerment in our lives, when we remember that Paul links them to our union with Christ, and when we remember that they operate primarily in the body of Christ, we will realize that the loving use of our spiritual gifts put God on display.
- I want us to pause at this point and soak in that truth for a moment. We are not talking about some mystical vision of God or a dream or Jesus on a piece of toast or some other nonsense like that. We are talking about seeing the very power of God in the life of another Believer.
- Let’s just take 4—5 minutes and privately think about when there were moments in your life where your heart craved some sense, some awareness, some longing for the glory of God to be put on display.

Audience Ask: When were some of those times? (*In times of fear, in times of confusion, in times of questioning, in times of need, in times of aloneness, etc.*)

B. Community Application

- We are going to finish class today with a small group project. We will split up into groups of 4 or 5 to work on this project. At the top of your handout, you will find a prompt. On the back of your handout, you will find the list of 7 current spiritual gifts with their brief definitions. On the front of your sheet, I'd like you to pick 3 of the gifts and how they would be needed in ministering to the need in the prompt. On the bottom, you need to list at least 2 other gifts and the cost of not being able to use them.
- **Prompt:** Its early February and Madeline just called the church office and spoke to the secretary. She was sobbing and struggling to keep it together on the phone as she shared what was going on. Her lost husband, Herb just came home drunk and angry. He has been fired from his job and went to the bar. On the way home he dinged the neighbor's car and took out their own mailbox. When Madeline confronted him, he flew into a rage and shoved her hard against the wall and told her to get out. She took their 2-year-old and newborn and prepared to leave. On the way out the door he grabbed her keys and took her house key and told her to not come back. She left with the children and made it to the local Wal-Mart before she realized she didn't have her purse, diapers for the baby, or warm enough clothes for any of them. She has not been at the church long and doesn't know very many people and she didn't even know what she was asking, she just needs help.

C. Conversational Meditation

- What was your frustration at having to limit which spiritual gifts could be used? What happens if there is a 'disabled' or 'amputated Christ' that is called upon to do ministry?
- How would you appeal to those gifts that you couldn't use in answering your prompt if I told you that it wasn't that they weren't available but that they were not willing?
- How can we know and experience the union with Christ that is our true condition as Believers? One way is through the use and experience of ministry with spiritual gifts. It is in those moments that we see Christ and that we put Him on display to the lost and to other Believers in the community of the church.

Big Idea: Spiritual Gifts are active demonstrations of the believer's union with Christ.

Week 5 Student Handout Side A

It's Time to See Christ:

Prompt: Its early February and Madeline just called the church office and spoke to the secretary. She was sobbing and struggling to keep it together on the phone as she shared what was going on. Her lost husband, Herb just came home drunk and angry. He has been fired from his job and went to the bar. On the way home he dinged the neighbor's car and took out their own mailbox. When Madeline confronted him, he flew into a rage and shoved her hard against the wall and told her to get out. She took their 2-year-old and newborn and prepared to leave. On the way out the door he grabbed her keys and took her house key and told her to not come back. She left with the children and made it to the local Wal-Mart before she realized she didn't have her purse, diapers for the baby, or warm enough clothes for any of them. She has not been at the church long and doesn't know very many people and she didn't even know what she was asking, she just needs help.

Use the chart on the back of the handout to see the definitions of seven active spiritual gifts to answer the questions below.

Two Gifts most needed to minister to this need:

1.

2.

Two Gifts not used and some consequences of their absence:

1.

2.

3.

Week 5 Student Handout Side B

Spiritual Gift	Definition
Administration	The unique and God-given ability to chart a course on how to get from Point A to Point B considering resources and hurdles.
Leadership	The unique and God-given ability to direct others that they are responsible for in a way that helps those people spiritually and helps a group accomplish those things God has called them to do.
Exhortation	The unique and God-given ability to come alongside someone and speak the Word in a way that comforts, encourages, and confronts to move them forward in their sanctification.
Giving	The unique and God-given ability to steward the resources that God has given to them to meet the needs of others with joy, thereby showcasing and demonstrating the Gospel.
Mercy	The unique and God-given ability to see the misery of another and seeking to minister to them practically, emotionally, and spiritually.
Serving	The unique and God-given ability to perceive practical needs and giving of themselves to see those needs met.
Teaching	The unique and God given ability to communicate the truths of the Word to Believers and the lost in a way that brings them to the point of change.

Lesson 6 Overview: Week 6 will highlight that it is because the Believer is United with Christ that they pursue the positive relational connections from Romans 12:9. Over all of these is love. Homework will ask the students to consider the pattern and power of Christ's love and ask them to initiate and pursue relating to one another in these ways.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson my students will learn that the life of Christ is the pattern and Union with Christ is the reality and power behind how Believers are to relate to one another in love.

Love at the Core
Romans 12:9

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Introduction:

Moving and Learning: Let's do a little moving around this morning to help us to work into our lesson today.

Get in a group if you only had brothers. Get in a group if you only had sisters. Get in a group if you had both brothers and sisters. Get in a group if you were an only child. *What are some things you think you learned or didn't learn because of only having one kind of sibling? What are some things you learned or didn't learn because of having both kinds of siblings? What are some things you learned or didn't learn because of having no siblings?*

Get in a group if you grew up knowing and being close to Grandparents. Get in a group if you didn't grow up knowing and being close to your Grandparents. *What are you most thankful for in having been able to know and be close to your Grandparents?*

Get in a group if you would describe your relationship with most of your immediate family (parents, children, and siblings) as close. Get in a group if you would describe your relationships with most of your immediate family as strained or distant. *What are some categories that you would use to describe the reason(s) for the strained or distant relationships? Note: this is not a comment on whether you love these people. (Unresolved Conflicts, Lack of pursuit of someone on one side, Intentional Withdrawal, Unintentional lack of communication, Time and distance between visits and communication, Disagreements over important things (religion, family life choices, lifestyle choices, politics, etc.), and Past hurts What are some ways that you have remained close to your family so that either these categories have been worked through or have not been an issue to overcome?*

Get in a group if you had negative past church experiences (before KRBC) and get in a group if your past church experiences were really good. What, in a general way, made those experiences good or bad?

Last week we learned together that we are designed for community and this community is inhabited by Christ. It is made up of people who are united with Christ and

are equipped to showcase Him through spiritual gifts. It really is like a family. What the rest of Romans 12 gets at is how hard those relationships can be even while they are critically important. We are going to spend the next two sessions of our this series on union with Christ learning how that union with Christ defines, guides, and addresses those community relationships.

In fact, we can be so bold as to say that our union with Christ and that same reality in others around us should be the controlling and dominant way we approach those relationships.

Because . . . Union with Christ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them.

Big Idea: The life of Christ is the pattern for our relationships but our union with Christ is the power that enables living that pattern.

I. Look to Christ's Love

The very first item on Paul's list should not really surprise us. Let me set the stage a bit so we can experience the consistency in Paul's teaching. Right after he lays out some offices in the church with their gifts in Ephesians 4 he says they should result in what? Eph 4:15a "speak the truth in love." In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul lays out his teaching on Spiritual Gifts and 1 Corinthians 13 is known as what chapter? Yep, the love chapter. Well, is Paul consistent to the point of predictability? You bet.

Rom 12:9 "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

A. Love that Reveals Sin

- The love that we are being called to showcase in this community is the very love of God Himself. This is not the same love someone has for a favorite pet, for a child, for a friend, for a parent, for a hobby, or anything else. This command to love God and to love others then is part and parcel of the Law we could never keep. In fact, Jesus uses the natural loves people have as a contrast to the love that is demanded by God. Jesus makes it the very core of the Gospel when He describes salvation in love terms. Matt 10:37-39 "37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."
- It is at the very heart of Gospel belief. It has never been enough to know God or who He is but rather it has always been a command to love God and others. Our lack of this kind of love is a sign of our sinfulness. If we don't love God and love like God, we don't know God.

B. Love that Shows Grace

- But love is not only the declaration of our sinful need, it is also the showcase of

God's glory in the Gospel. Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Rom 5:6-8 "6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God's love transcends our sinfulness to rescue us from our sinfulness. It is God's zeal for His own glory to love the unlovable. But this love is not just rescuing, it is powerful through salvation to change us.

C. Love Transformed

- One of the things the Gospel does then is set us free to love God and others. A heart that is transformed by the Gospel will be a heart that loves God and others. It is so significant as to be a test of salvation. 1 Jn 4:7-8 "7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been borne of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Love is a sign, a symptom, an indicator of a person that has been saved. Love is a fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22. It is essential to our relationship with Christ and ongoing obedience to God as Jesus explained to His Disciples in Jn 15:9-10 "9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."
- What does this love look like for you and me then? There are a lot of definitions but let me borrow one from Paul Tripp. "Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving."
- We love because we have been loved. Where can we look to follow a pattern for this love? The model for our love is the love of Christ.

II. Christ-like Love

There is always a lot of talk about love in the world. "What the world needs now is love, sweet love" as the song goes. Of course, we know that the way the world thinks of love is not biblical and can't be our model. At the same time, God is love and yet we see Jesus running people out of the Temple on one page and defending a prostitute to a Pharisee on another page. Which is loving? Both are somehow? So, how can we really model our love like that of Christ? It has to begin with the character of Christ.

Rom 12:9 "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

A. Hate Evil

- Hate evil: Ps 97:10 "O you who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked." Why does the Psalmist link this love of God with a hatred for evil in this text? The rest of the verse tells us. We operate thinking that self-preservation can and does happen through sinful means. To love the Lord is to call us to hate evil and trust Him to preserve us and

deliver us. We don't repay evil for evil, we turn the other cheek, we don't avenge ourselves, we don't slander those that slander us, we don't gossip about those that gossip about us, we don't seek the hurt of others that have hurt us, instead we hate evil from enemies, but we hate it so much we refuse to repay their evil with evil of our own. Be angry and sin not.

B. Hold to Good

- Hold to the good: Amos 5:14-15 "14 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. 15 Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." Amos 5 is building on this theme of oppression of the weak and the poor. In verse 10 there is a despise of an impartial judge, rejection of those that speak truth. Verse 11 there is the oppression of the poor through taxation, so it is systemic and organized, in order to fill the bank accounts of the wealthy for them to be safer, houses of stone, and more comfortable, vineyards. Verse 12 there is the affliction of the righteous, bribery, and more rejection of the poor. Why all these things? Because there is an embracing of evil and a rejection of good because it serves their self-advancement. We do this all the time. We ask first how it will affect us before we consider how others will be impacted by that law, that rule, that legislation, that choice, that decision.
- It is this kind of love that is genuine. It is genuine because as we have seen, it is not natural to any of us. Instead, it is Christ in us coming out of us. We are seeing in real time what we were learning from the start of Romans 12 a few weeks ago. It is a retraining of our minds away from what the world says to biblical truth.
- Having been united with Christ in His death and resurrection we are to love others like He loves them. That is genuine love that hates evil and clings to the good in our relationships with others.

C. Does Good

- Should it be any wonder that we are called in our relationships with other believers to push each other to love and good works (Heb 10:24-25)? The culmination of hating evil and loving good is a life that is now transformed by love and now shows love. It makes no sense to say "I really loved that person but I never told them or showed them." Christ does good by seeking justice and showing mercy. Christ does good by serving and sacrificing. Christ does good by pursuing Peter when he is ashamed and broken. Christ does good borne out of His love and we also will seek to do good as a reflection of His love in us.

The life of Christ is the pattern for our relationships but our union with Christ is the power that enables living that pattern.

III. Power and Pattern

So, our lack of Godly love shows us our sinfulness and our need of salvation. Salvation applies the love of God to us by rescuing us through Christ. Union with Christ

seats, places, immerses the person and power of Christ in us so that we are now set free to love God and others like we never could before. It is the reality of the truth that we love because God has first loved us. But, even in our closest relationships, this is really hard. We need His power. But also it is complex so we need His pattern for us also. Enter verses 10 through 21.

Rom 12:10—21 “10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

How many positive demonstrations of love are there in these verses? In all honesty, I think we’d all come up with slightly different numbers. It feels like one of those grocery lists from Paul that is trying to cover all the bases. Let’s look at it though through the lenses of one of Christ’s most memorable demonstrations of love.

We will make two lists from a text many of us are familiar with. On one side we will mark what Jesus did that was loving and on the other side we will mark a corresponding phrase from Rom 12:9—21.

Jn 13:1—17 “1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” 7 Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” 8 Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.” 12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s

feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

I am going to give you one of these here at the end but the rest I want to ask you to do this week as a way of seating these truths in your heart and mind, with one other aspect. Pick one you can do this week.

The Pattern of Jesus from John 13:1-17	Real life from Romans 12:10- 21
Ex: Washes Judas’s feet	Ex: 12:10 Outdo in honor, 12:21 Overcome evil

Union with Christ in the community means more than loving like Jesus but it never means less than that.

Conclusion:

Union with Christ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them.

Union with Christ means that we will have a disposition of love toward other Believers in a sacrificial, initiating, and persistent way just like Jesus has loved us. We will do this because we are united with Him.

So . . . The life of Christ is the pattern for our relationships but our union with Christ is the power that enables living that pattern.

Week 6 Student Handout

The Pattern of Jesus from John 13:1-17	Real life from Romans 12:10-21
<p>Ex: Washes Judas's feet</p> <p>The account in John makes it clear that Jesus knew Judas was now an enemy and yet He washes his feet also!</p>	<p>Ex: 12:10 Outdo in honor, 12:21</p> <p>Overcome evil: Jesus chooses to honor Judas by serving him and overcomes his evil by this good service. Jesus is content to wait on God's judgment.</p>

One area I can apply these truths to my relationships this week by following the power of Jesus and relying on the power of Jesus is to:

Lesson 7 Overview: Week 7 will place an emphasis on Romans 12:13. It will build on week 6's emphasis on love to how Union with Christ is the foundation for how the Believer is to see others around them. The first focus on looking out for the needs of others in the community is a direct result of seeing each other as members of the Body of Christ. The second focus will be on the opening of hearts first and homes second as expressions of hospitality. The session will close with an emphasis on how these acts accompanied with gratitude build community.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson the students will learn the truth that Union with Christ is their daily reality that drives loving God and others in intentionally practical ways.

Hearts, Homes, and Hope Romans 12:13

13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Introduction:

Last week we saw that love is the overarching truth that governs all of the relationships of the Believer. This is true because God who is love now abides in us through our union with Christ. We only have two sessions left in this study. Paul wraps us Romans 12 with now fewer than 20 different commands about what this looks like. Hopefully you did some of the homework last week to work through one example of this from Jesus when He washes the feet of the disciples and compared it to the commands in verses 9 through 21. Having said that though, there are two that touch on two key aspects of our lives, our time and our money. So, this week we want to do the hard work of thinking through those together.

Let's see our definition of union with Christ together as we start. Union with Christ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them.

But what if I feel like I don't really matter to the community? What if I feel like I have little to offer? What if I feel like I serve but am not served? What if I feel like I serve lots more than others? What if I feel like my service is in vain? What if sacrificing time and money and my home for others is not just selfishness but weariness and insecurity? Is there any way for that person to move forward in working out their union with Christ in practical ways? Yes, hang on, because it will get a little bumpy as we deal with truths that can free us from these feelings as we love God and each other.

We already know from Romans 12:2 that we need to experience the transformation of our minds and that we need to work out the reality of our union with Christ through love. This morning we want to key in on two ways this can work out in our daily lives with each other. It is going to require us to think differently, see each other differently, and then act differently.

Big Idea: Transformed thinking leads to transformed seeing which results in transformed acting.

I. Little Christ Reflectors

“Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has — by what I call "good infection." Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.” C.S. Lewis Now, we are not actually little Christ’s, there is one Christ and we are not God but, we could say that we are little Christ reflectors.

Lewis was not the first one to coin that term. In the beginning the church was called “the way” (Acts 9:2). Maybe it was after Jesus saying He was the way, the truth, and the life. Maybe it was after the conversation Thomas had with Jesus where he said they don’t know the way when Jesus was talking about going to Heaven (Jn 14:5). Or maybe it was a reference to the ‘way’ these followers of Jesus lived. Both the term ‘little Christs’ and ‘the Way’ are getting at similar ideas; the Christian life is a very different sort of living.

Union with Christ is literally the way being worked out of each one of us. As we are in Christ and He is in us both in death and resurrection, we are to live out that reality.

Audience Ask: What is the chief method of demonstrating we are followers of Jesus, the Way, and working out our union with Christ? (*Jn 13:35 “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*)

Rom 12:13 “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

Audience Ask: Is this love? Is this love connected to union with Christ? How and why? *It is obviously love. It is connected first to the death of Christ because giving sacrificially to others and serving them is death to us. It is connected to the resurrection of Christ because it recognizes we are living a new life with a new purpose on earth.*

II. Seeing Each Other Rightly

The emphasis here in Rom 12:13 and in what Jesus said in Jn 13:35 is on other followers of Christ.

Audience Ask: What are some ways Christians don’t do a good job of loving other Christians? *Why is this? Judging one another, reputation sins of gossip and slander, seeing struggles as a ‘them’ problem, isolation, fear of being open, failure to be invested in each other’s’ lives, etc. We see them as less important as the lost or as ourselves.*

We are called into deep relationships with other Christians. As we learned, God has created us for community.

Family terms are used to describe our relationships (Rom 8:29, 1 Pet 1:22; 3:8, 1 Jn 3:18)

We are called to discipline those within the community which is an act of loving care (1 Cor 5)

We are called to spiritually care for each other (Heb 3:12—14)

We are members of the same body (1 Cor 12:26—27 “26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”)

Instead of seeing each other as fellow citizens of this area we should see each other as family. Instead of seeing each other as isolated we should see each other as someone to be responsible for spiritually. Instead of seeing each other as members of the same church we should see each other as members of the same body.

Latoya Wimberly and Ashley Thomas were best friends for 17 years before discovering they share the same dad. Suddenly these best friends for almost two decades discover they are family. Julia Tinetti and Cassandra Madison were both adopted from the Dominican Republic and became friends at work. Their friendship went deep and they acted more like sisters than just friends. Fast forward 8 years and they take a DNA test and though they had been placed through separate adoption agencies they find out that they are sisters.

Audience Ask: What would be the effect of this transformation of the nature of their relationship? Does it even matter?

If we truly begin to relate to one another the way Paul is telling us here, we will be much more than friends, we become family. We must see each other this way before we will begin to obey these two deep and difficult commands.

III. Relating Rightly

A. Opening our Hearts

- Contributing to the needs of the saints is a heart that doesn't ask what is the minimum but what is the maximum I can give. It is a heart that sees temporal things as eternal investments. It is a heart that is full of Jesus so it doesn't need things to satisfy. It is a heart that sees the needs of others. It is awakened to those around you. It is alert to opportunities. It is planning on giving. It is focused on the lack of others rather than their own needs. It can give anonymously so the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. It can give gift cards, clothes, food, furniture, and service.
- Charles Spurgeon tells of receiving a wealthy man's invitation to come preach at his rural church to help the members raise funds to pay off a debt. The man also told Spurgeon that he was free to use his country house, his town house or his

seaside home. Spurgeon wrote back, "Sell one of the places and pay the debt yourself."

- The NASB says communicate with the needs of the saints. It captures an important nuance of the word. It is to come up under the need because you identify with their need. The Macedonians wanted to give because they knew what it was to have need and so wanted to meet needs.

Community Brainstorm: What are some common cultural areas where needs arise that can be met with time, skill, or money? (*Medical crisis, natural disaster, theft, loss of job, income change, counseling, repairs, childcare, etc.*)

B. Opening our Home

- Hospitality recognizes that my home is not primarily a safe haven for me to enjoy but a place of safety to invite others into. Hospitality recognizes that it must be both planned and spontaneous. Planned or it never happens, spontaneous because it is always available and responsive to the needs of others. Hospitality is not about proper entertaining with just the right meal, entertainment, and timing. Instead, it is about first opening your heart and life to others with the natural outflow of that being time and connection.
- How many people from your church have you invited into your home for a meal? When was the last time someone stayed the night? Do others come to you when they need help, or do you give the impression that you don't want to be bothered? Is your family intentional about welcoming others into your home, even if they are different from you or if they make you feel awkward and uncomfortable? Why do you fear welcoming others into your life and your home? What promises has God given you that you can cling to for hope, peace, and assurance?
- "Let's remember that hospitality isn't about what, when, and where. It's about the who. Hospitality is about the person we get to welcome in and love. We can trust that the Lord will bless those who come into our doors if we have hearts to serve and love them. Your guests might not remember your space, but they will surely remember your care." – Trilia Newbell

Community Brainstorm: If hospitality begins with opening our hearts before our homes, how can we pursue greater 'heart opening' with others and bring them into our lives?

IV. Our Crazy Family

Well, I have been building the case here that because of our union with Christ and the union with Christ of other believers, it should drive us to see each other differently and respond differently. But, what if seeing each other this way can actually put some obstacles in opening our hearts and homes?

Galatians 6:9-10 “9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

It can be profoundly difficult doing life with family sometimes because we fall into the trap of believing that every relationship is like a bridge where you build 50% and I build 50% and then the bridge is completed. So, if you are loving and serving and caring like we see here in Romans 12:13 and you are never being loved or served like this, it gets real weary real fast. Now there is a real complexity here in this moment. Even though, Jesus doesn't example and Paul doesn't teach us to open our hearts and homes as others around us open their hearts and homes to us but instead it is in response to Christ, it is hard to train our minds this way.

It is complex because some are needier than others for all kinds of reasons. It is complex because some have a greater capacity to serve, give, and provide care than others for all kinds of limiting reasons. It is complex because simply knowing that everyone is under this command, it is easy to judge others. It is complex because some don't know they should do this, they are immature. It is complex because some refuse to do it, they are disobedient. It is complex because some are really tired of doing this, they need encouragement.

Transformed thinking leads to transformed seeing which results in transformed acting.

So, suddenly, 6 weeks leading up to this point helps us.

I have received the open heart and ultimate open hospitality of Jesus through salvation. I am united in His life, death, and resurrection so it is now Him living through me.

I don't open my heart or home because of others but because of Him.

I don't receive the open heart and home of those here because I have earned it, deserve it, or have a right to it but because of Jesus in them coming out of them.

One of the premier ways we can help one another here is by honest expressions of gratitude for experiencing someone else's open heart or hospitality.

You might remember that two of the statements on our pre-series quiz focused time and money and a third on gratitude. In our culture there is little we value more than our time and our money. What about gratitude? There are few things that can build a stronger community than genuine expressions of gratitude for others. Now, studies are clear that being grateful people is good for us. It increases our personal happiness and satisfaction. But it has deep impacts on the health of a community.

One study showed that gratitude increases a person's sense of worth and value to the community while reducing their feelings of insecurity about whether they are needed or matter. People who receive expressions of gratitude experience greater alertness,

enthusiasm, attentiveness, determination, and energy in comparison with those who don't.

Audience Ask: How does gratitude when you have served someone else with time, money, talents, or hospitality encourage you out of your weariness?

The third lowest score on our pre-series test was, "I have expressed gratitude to another member of KRBC for how they have shown me Christ in the past month." You can help your own weariness and the weariness of others if you would simply meditate on how you have been served and expressing gratitude for Jesus in them coming out of them." To not show gratitude for the work of Jesus through others to you, is to rob them of the encouragement they need and God of the glory He deserves.

Opening our hearts and our homes fills others with hope in the weariness of life as they experience Jesus. Opening our hearts and homes fills us with hope and Jesus changes us. Expressing gratitude brings the work of Jesus into the light which gives hope to the weary.

Big Idea: Transformed thinking leads to transformed seeing which results in transformed acting.

Week 8 will place an emphasis on the benefits and process of a believer pursuing a mature identity through union with Christ. The lesson will focus on two key texts to accomplish this. James details a significant consequence of a believer not living in the reality of their union with Christ, namely their double mindedness. John 15 is when Jesus uses language that Paul, Peter, and John will later pick up on about being ‘in Christ’ with its necessity and benefits. By exploring both texts the students will see the need for increasing their comprehension of their union with Christ and have a path forward for increasing this comprehension and application.

Learning Outcome: By the end of this lesson the students will learn the truth that Union with Christ is at the core of the identity of the believer and it is a truth that requires a life-long intentional process of discovery for spiritual health and maturity.

A Life-Long Journey

Introduction:

This morning we are going to wrap up our series with a significant connection to the very core of who we are. We want to finish with considering how union with Christ forms our identity and why understanding this reality should be a life-long process for us.

There are things in our lives that can happen suddenly and yet take a long time to process. Typically, people think of those as negative things like losing a job, an illness, a car accident, and so on. But there are many positive things that can happen that lead to a sudden change in our lives that take a long time to process. Marriage, having a baby, moving away from home, starting college, finishing school, getting a job, retiring, getting over a long illness, and so on. Sudden changes bring all their own stresses in our lives and processing through them means we are coming to grips with how it has impacted us, what it reveals about us, and how it has changed us.

An incredibly positive thing happens when we are saved. We are put in Christ. Rom 6:3-5 “3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 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. 5 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.” Understanding and growing in applying our union with Christ is a wonderful truth borne out of our salvation that takes a lifetime to fully embrace. But it is also one of, if not the most, worthwhile pursuits for every believer.

Big Idea: Understanding your union with Christ forms a life-long foundation for healthy spiritual living.

Let’s start with one last reminder of what union with Christ means. **Union with Christ is the spiritual reality that a Believer is in Christ, Christ is in them, and the controlling reality of every relationship in their life is to be Christ coming out of them.**

I. What if I Don’t Commit to This Pursuit?

Does it really matter if I don’t understand my union with Christ as a Christian? Yes, because it is at the very core of your being and living like Jesus. In 1 Corinthians we are introduced to this troubled church with the concept of a warped identity. Some are in Paul, some are in Peter, and others say they are in Christ, but all of these are in a way that is a twisted view of who they really are. They don’t understand their union with Christ, and it lies at the very foundation of their struggles.

James introduces us to a significant idea in his epistle that is a great description of what happens for the believer who is struggling with coming to grips with a true understanding of who they are in Christ. The book of James is all about what genuine faith is like. What is that faith in? It is faith in Christ. So what happens when a believer is not fully engaged with, comprehending, or living out this genuine faith in Christ? James coins this previously unknown term, *dipsuche*, or double-mindedness. James 1:5–8 “5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” What James is contrasting is a stable versus a wavering faith. It is a believer who has one eye on God and one eye on something else. Now that something else can be the world, sin, personal ambitions and desires, the sufferings of life, and so on, all things and more that James unpacks throughout his epistle.

But at the core, James gives us a master class on genuine faith. It is a faith that is transformative belief. It is a belief in God that changes us and this change results in different behavior. To ask in faith is to ask of God for wisdom sourced out of a belief of who God is, who you are in Him, and you can see that oozing out of your life. This is critically important because we want to be tempted like the disciples to ask “how much faith do I need to get this wisdom from God?” But when Jesus answers questions about amount of faith He always points to the object of faith not the amount of faith. Our faith can be revealed (Matt 13:18-23), strengthened (Jas 1:2), and purified (1 Pet 1:7). But the object of our faith is Jesus and the results of genuine faith are always changed behavior. James 2:17–20 “17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”

What James is describing with this double mindedness is a person who is not living in or out the reality of their faith. They are not embracing their identity in Christ. They are not living out the truth of their union with Christ which is at the very core of their faith. When we have one eye on God and one eye on our strength, we pray during trials but without faith believing that God will give us all good things we need so we have one eye on Him and one eye on our ability to deliver ourselves. When we have one eye on God and one eye on ourselves, we think of our money as a means for my security and consumption instead of as an instrument for Christ to use for His kingdom first and foremost. When we have one eye on God and one eye on ourselves we categorize people as those we need or want and those we don’t because we don’t embrace our union with Christ who loves His enemies, prays and cares for those that oppose Him, and initiates live.

Does it really matter if we don’t understand our union with Christ as a Christian? Yes, because it is at the very core of your being and living like Jesus. To not understand and live in the reality of your union with Christ will leave you unstable and inconsistent in your Christian walk, it will leave you not understanding who you really are which will hinder your fight against sin, it will leave you disconnected from the resurrection power of Christ to help you in your daily life.

II. Jesus Wants Us to Know Who We Are (Jn 15:1-11)

Throughout this series I have told you how burdened Paul was about this concept of our union with Christ and how he kept using the phrase ‘in Christ.’ As we finish this series though I want us to walk away with the words of Jesus. Of course, I am not saying Paul’s are less since they are inspired, but I am saying that there is a really poetic and

powerful way that Jesus communicates this truth. I am saying that it is a core part of the last sermon He preaches, and I am saying that the truths He gives about what it means to be united with Him form the clear basis for all that we have looked at over the last 7 weeks.

A. Vines and Fruit (15:1)

- Jesus is in the Garden of Olive Groves, or as we know it, the Garden of Gethsemane. It is the pruning season, it is nighttime, and Jesus is going to be arrested in just a few hours. All of this plays a role in this living illustration for this truth of union with Christ. First and foremost, Jesus is flipping the image of a vine on its head from the rest of the Bible. Israel has been called the vine in 11 different texts in 5 different books of the Old Testament. The theme is the same. Israel was supposed to be the conduit for the blessings of God to the world. Through Israel, the vine, the world was supposed to experience the fruit, the blessings of seeing, knowing, and following God. Israel though is fruitless in this. The ultimate image of this is during the Passover Week, Jesus rebuking a fruitless fig tree that represents Israel and it dying. Here, Jesus is taking this image of a conduit for the power and blessings of God, the vine, and replacing Israel with Himself. Good vines bring good fruit.

B. In Christ or Not (15:2-6)

Audience Ask: Jesus is the true conduit of the power and blessings of God and if a person is not ‘in Christ’ what happens and what does this mean? *(They are cut off and burned, it is symbolic of judgment and eternal punishment in hell.)*

- Now I want to point out that Jesus makes it clear that the power for fruitfulness is not sourced in the branches. It is sourced in the vine. True connection to the vine results in fruit.

Audience Ask: Jesus is empowering fruit bearing and judging those that bear no fruit. It is a revealing that those branches are not really ‘in Him.’ The contrast is fruitful branches. What then is this fruit? *(The character/person of Christ coming out of us, Fruits of the Spirit, obedience to Christ, love of God and others, evidences of the persona and power of the Holy Spirit in us like spiritual gifts.)*

C. Fruits we Long For (15:7-11)

- Consistently, research proves that the keys to a happy life are not more money or things or more of what you want here. The keys to a happy life are deep meaningful relationships. Deeper joy grows in gardens of deep love. Those aren't meaningless words. Look at the cycle that Jesus lays out here. We are in Him, in the vine, and as a result we have access to this incredible power of the only omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, ever faithful, ever loving, ever merciful God because we are loved by Him, and we love Him deeply. This results in deep abiding joy. No matter our relationship status here, we have this deep and never changing relational connection to God and are safe in His love. This then flows out of us to love others which will result in deep relational connection to others. We could say it this way. Do you want a joyful and safely loved life? Be in Christ and come to know more of what that means and what it looks like to live out that truth.

III. Chasing the Truth

In doing a lot of reading about identity it became clear that we are who we are whether we realize it or not. Does it matter? Well, it matters because a failure to live in this reality of our union with Christ sets us up to be double-minded and Christ wants us to know and live in this reality. But it also robs us of power and joy. Of course, there is the classic cartoon of the elephant terrified of the mouse it could crush in a moment. We need to be on mission to chase the truth of our union with Christ. But how?

A. Pursue Self-Awareness

- Theologian and counselor Robert Cheong helpfully says “When we lack self-awareness, we misunderstand ourselves, and that leads to misunderstanding God as well. Our pride blinds us with inaccurate ideas about who we are in relationship with God.” Erick Erickson, the leading researcher on identity saw two figures as wonderful examples of mature identity. Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards. Why? Because they had a real understanding of who they were and sought to grow and change. A mature identity for the Christian begins with asking and answering if they are in Christ or not. But it is also a life-long journey to understand and live out that reality. Good self-awareness leads to changing behavior and greater spiritual health. It happens in our mind, will, and emotions.

B. The Mind, Will, and Emotions

- Prior to salvation, a person is at odds with God in how he thinks, feels, and acts. Ephesians 2:1-3 “ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”
- The justification of a person redeems positionally but also sets the believer on a course of transformation involving his mind (Eph 2:17-18), will (Eph 2:20-32), and emotions (Col 3:1). Conversion results in new thoughts, new actions, and new desires.
- As we come to grips with how our thoughts are not God’s thoughts, so we intentionally start believing what He says instead of what we think, we are pursuing a mature understanding of our identity in Christ. We think insecure things like we are not important, valuable, or worthy to be part of a Christian community. The truth is that we are chosen by God, loved by Him, and empowered by Him through the abiding presence of Christ to show Him to others around us in unique and significant ways even when they don’t feel unique or significant to us. We think we are the most important or neediest person in the room and the truth is that everyone is needy and important and as we seek to love and serve God and others, we will find greater joy and rest.
- As we then act on God’s truth instead of our opinions, we will cement those ideas deeper. When we choose to outdo one another in honor because we want to honor God in and through a person, when we choose to serve out of our weakness

because we know it is His strength and not ours, and when we choose to keep pressing into others instead of running away from others because we are safe in God, the truths that drive them become more real and important to us.

- As we experience the comfort of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, and the joy of obeying God, our emotions will become connected to these thoughts and actions so we will increasingly say, that was Christ coming out of me because I am in Him. This is only possible for the believer who makes intentional efforts to see their wrong thinking, change their behavior, and celebrate Christ's work in them.

C. A Life-long Truth and Lasting Illustration

- James contrasts doublemindedness with faith filled living. The faith he lays out is an active faith that is radically different from normal living. It is a faith that sees the length of my life as a change process (Jas 1:19-25), takes responsibility for your communication (Jas 1:26; 3:1-12), assumes care for the needs and hurts of others (Jas 1:27-2), chases relational connection and healing with others (Jas 3:13-4:12), just to name some in a general way. What are all of these? These are evidence, proofs, signs of genuine faith, the very presence of God in you, changing you, and growing you. It is your union with Christ coming out in real time. The truth is this, genuine faith on display is the increasing mature understanding of your union with Christ.
- The illustration to help us every day is from Jesus in John 15:2–4 “2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” The pruning process is the removal of our flesh, our sinfulness, our worldly thoughts and deeds, our double-mindedness so that we can be better conduits of the person of Christ. It is His power, not ours, His thoughts, not ours, His deeds, not ours and yet we get the benefit.
- Where is God removing selfish love from me so that I can increase in my capacity to love others like Him? What joy and love is increasing in and out of my life as I live in the truth of my union with Christ? What can I ask God for today to help me understand and apply union with Christ today? John 15:16–17 “16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

Big Idea: Understanding your union with Christ forms a life-long foundation for healthy spiritual living.

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING MEMBERS OF KENNERLY ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH IN IRMO, SOUTH CAROLINA, TO UNDERSTAND UNION WITH CHRIST AS A BASIS FOR BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

Stephen Paul Johns, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

This project sought to assess the current understanding and application of the doctrine of the believer's union with Christ as it applies to biblical community at Kennerly Road Baptist Church in Irmo, South Carolina. Chapter 1 provides the ministry context of the project, rationale, and the goals the project sought to accomplish. Chapter 2 examines union with Christ from a general summary, a background of Romans, and an examination of Romans 12 to prove that a believer's union with Christ should be his primary understanding of identity and inform how he does biblical community. Chapter 3 addresses the need for believers to understand that their mature identity is in Christ and demonstrates that the local church is the primary community for a believer to understand and live out their union with Christ. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the assessment of the participants, writing and assessment of the curriculum, implementation of the curriculum, and the post-seminar assessment. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals.

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