

August 3, 2025

The One and the Many or Believers as God's Temple

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Unifying Principle (Focus of Lesson)

People yearn for a sense of belonging within a community that shares a common set of values. How do splinter groups threaten the community? Paul says disputes among believers are destructive and that unity emerges only when the church's foundation is built on Jesus Christ.

Goals for the Learner

1. To assess the factors faced by the Corinthian church community that caused Paul to write the message of 1 Corinthians 2 and 3.
2. To value the foundation and building materials that make for a solid and united church community.
3. To identify the ways in which God's Holy Temple shows in and through you.

Challenges For the Week

1. What is the summary of the problems in the Corinthian church? Arguments about authority have caused divisions in the church along with questions about sexual morality, marriage (chs. 5, 7), lawsuits (ch. 6), and unholy behavior at the Lord's Supper (ch. 11).
2. What goes into building a structure, beginning with preparation, and ending with the final coat of paint?
3. What are reasons why the church today looks to Christ as less a foundation, and more of a rescuer, helping us cope when we can't fix things? What would Paul say to this church?
4. Recall the significance of the Temple for the Jewish people—the center of Israel's worship. The Holy of Holies housed the very presence of God. Only on the Day of Atonement was the high priest allowed into this inner sanctum to offer a sacrifice for the nation's sins.
5. What are some church divisions that you have experienced?
6. Name a person, an experience, or an event that has been a teacher for you. Thank God for the grace you've received through their teachers.

August 10, 2025

How to be Happy or Our Bodies Belong to God

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Unifying Principle (Focus of Lesson)

We desire happy and satisfying lives that are pleasing to both us and others. By what standard do we measure a good life? In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul advocates a way of life governed by a conviction that our bodies belong to God.

Goals for the Learner

1. To identify Paul's guidance on the various ways in which believers glorify or dishonor God with their bodies.
2. To appreciate a renewed commitment to preserving our bodies as worthy temples of God's Spirit.
3. To offer examples of worshiping God that utilize each: mind, body, and spirit.

Challenges for the Week

1. Research to discover the Greek dualistic view of the body (impermanent, inferior) and soul (eternal, superior), which concludes that what one does with the body is disconnected from the soul. Paul says God is not a dualist. God created human beings and holds equal value for the whole person: body, spirit, and mind.
2. What is Paul's perspective that the freedom given to the believers is not absolute: all things are allowed, but not all things are beneficial (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:23)?
3. Reflect on Paul's call to discipline the sexual urges and name other ways that spiritual life requires religious discipline and communal accountability.
4. Develop a word study of Greek *porneia* and all that the word entails. Prostitutes were often linked to temples, with sex as a sacramental way of communing with a god. Wonder how that image informs Paul's notion that, having been bought with a price, we are temples of the Spirit.
5. Research and practice body prayer. Visit "The Essential Practice of Body Prayer" at patheos.com.
6. Name things that compete with our relationship with Christ: self-interested financial dealings, compromised loyalties, personal behavior that inadvertently promotes injustice and poverty.

August 17, 2025

Finding Peace in a Conflicted World or Jews and Gentiles Form One Temple
Ephesians 2:11-22

Unifying Principle (Focus of the Lesson)

Differing cultural and religious backgrounds can stir up conflict. How do we find a sense of peace that will enable us to thrive in the world today? Ephesians declares that Jews and Gentiles, who were once alienated from each other, were brought together in Christ, who has broken down the dividing wall and made them one—joined together and growing into a dwelling place for God.

Goals for the Learner

1. To discover points of agreement/disagreement with other Christian believers.
2. To accept the value of differing Christian faith practices that may be unfamiliar.
3. To dialogue with others from another cultural or religious background about ways to honor and worship God.

Challenges for the Week

1. Review how the early church learned to welcome Gentile converts without imposing circumcision. What was the purpose of circumcision?
2. Prepare a word study of *sarx* (self-indulgent human behavior). The author is not a dualist. He is criticizing, not the flesh per se, but a fleshly indulgence that trumps godly service. In Galatians, Paul contrasts “the works of the flesh” with “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-23).
3. Research the Greek word *irene* (“peace”) and the related word in Hebrew, *shalom*. What is the scope of Christ as peace between Gentiles and Jews?
4. Read Galatians 3:28-29. Wonder how the unity expressed in the text can expand to other hostile divisions in the church.
5. Find a diagram of Herod’s Temple and pay attention to the wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles (the outermost court) from the rest of the Temple. Wonder if this is the dividing wall of hostility referenced in Ephesians 2.
6. Name experiences of churches that have joined together and become one. What were the drawbacks and the challenges? Did the new church take down the dividing walls or did hostility grow?

August 24, 2025

All We Need is Love or Sacrifices of Praise and Good Works

Hebrews 13:9-21

Unifying Principle (Focus of Lesson)

We struggle with loving others and doing good toward family, friends, and neighbors. What lasting examples do we have to guide our actions toward others? The writer of Hebrews urges Christians to look to Jesus, who suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood, and through him continually share what we have as sacrifices pleasing to God.

Goals For the Learner

1. To compare the ways the author of Hebrews instructs believers to show love with Jesus's model of loving.
2. To value the love Jesus showed to God and for us by enduring such sacrifices.
3. To renew their commitment to love others as a sacrifice that pleases God.

Challenges For the Week

1. Define *typology* and illustrate it by the comparison between Jesus's death and a sin offering in the Tabernacle. However, note the shift in the typology—Jesus dies on profane ground outside the city, not within the sanctity of Tabernacle or Temple. Thus, the tables are turned: the holy becomes profane, the profane becomes sacred.
2. Compare Hebrews with Mark 15:38. At Jesus's death, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple was torn from top to bottom. The dividing wall between heaven and earth has been destroyed in Christ's cross.
3. What is proper Christian worship now that the ultimate sacrifice has occurred in Christ (10:12)?
4. Name ways your congregation makes a "sacrifice of praise" to God.
5. Note that Christians use the word *service* to describe worship and outreach. Discuss how the Hebrews reading makes that connection explicit.
6. In the spirit of unknowingly entertaining angels (13:2), support organizations that provide food, shelter, and other assistance to homeless people, migrants, and refugees.

August 31, 2025

Building from the Ground Up or Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

1 Peter 2:1-12

Unifying Principle (Focus of Lesson)

People desire a solid foundation on which to build their lives. What examples from history provide a pattern for such a foundation? First Peter reminds Christians that we, like living stones built on the spiritual foundation of Christ, are called to live sacrificially.

Goals for the Learner

1. To argue that Jesus provides a solid foundation and model for sacrificial living.
2. To value the faithful life pattern of Christ.
3. To enact honorable deeds that glorify God.

Challenges For the Week

1. Explain the Temple analogy's development from describing Christ as the true Temple, in which God dwells (John 2:21), to Christ as the rejected "cornerstone" of the true Temple.
2. Explore the idea that Christ's followers are the living stones who form God's house around the cornerstone. Compare Paul's urging in Romans 12:1, "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." How do stones and sacrifices worship God?
3. Think of ways Christians can live into their role as priests in the house of God. Look at the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and our calling to offer the grace and mercy of God to others.
4. For those who balk about being thought of as "a holy people," what word can be offered on the priority of grace, that salvation is a gift, not a result of good works, and that God confers holiness, not we ourselves.
5. Why does faithful living include honoring the emperor, who may not be honorable? How do we honor our less-reputable leaders today?
6. What can we do to live in gratefulness to God who has "called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (v. 9)?