

Imagine a Church Without You

"It's a Wonderful Life" - part 2

December 8, 2013

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

DAY 1: Community

The world *scrambles* to *earn* its identity.

The Christian's identity is *given*.

There are only two ways to try to establish our identity: Approach #1: Get it through your own efforts: through how people treat you, achievement, success, financial "security," etc. Or, Approach #2: Receive God's "take" on your identity.

Why is it so hard to grasp Approach #2? Approach #1 seems to "reasonable," "doable," and especially appeals to our pride, the desire to "control," and the desire to feel superior. That's a strong tonic! Unfortunately, we are hardly even aware that that's what's driving us. The effects of Approach #1 is pressure, stress, and rotten attitudes toward people, "life," self, and/or God.

In contrast, Approach #2, the Christian's identity, is set in stone, that is, if you'll turn away from pride and self-will that wants to establish one's own identity. Until our pride and will are surrendered it will be impossible to rest in an identity that God gives you. As Jesus said, "*Unless you become as a child...*"

You belong. Your identity is rooted in (1) What God thinks of you as seen in the cross, (2) Your place in His family, and (3) You have a role to play *in community*. Your life matters.

Your identity is minimized in isolation.

Your identity is magnified by being in community.

In the Christmas movie, "It's a Wonderful Life," George Bailey, a banker, has fallen on hard times. He decides that the world would be better off without him so he plans to jump off a bridge to take his life. But an angel is sent to rescue him. The angel's approach is to show George just how important his life really is. The angel does this by showing George how the history of his town would have unfolded without him. It's not a pretty. People he would have helped go without his help and their lives end up worse because of it. The town of Bedford Falls is taken over by his banking rival, a ruthless man whose greed brings crime & poverty.

1 Cor. 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.

1. What ways is our identity given to us by God?
2. Each believer has been given at least one spiritual gift. What does that imply about you?
3. What is your gift to be used to do? What does that mean for your identity?

DAY 2: Gifts Used in Community

By the end of the movie *George Bailey* is begging for the chance to go on living. He's seen his life in a larger perspective. The current trouble which seemed hopeless, is now small compared to the fact that his life is a gift meant to bring blessing beyond what he could have imagined.

In the middle of his trouble he could never have imagined how different the world would be without him.

1 Cor. 12:8 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, ...

1. How do Christians come by the spiritual gifts they have?
2. If someone tells you they don't think they have anything to offer, what would Paul tell them?
3. Whether or not you think you have something to contribute really doesn't matter. (We can deceive ourselves into thinking we don't have something to offer).
4. How would this awareness that you have at least one spiritual gift from which others could benefit strike you? How does this truth relate to how you see yourself? How God sees you?
5. Your value is rooted in community not in isolation! The "American way" and the sinful way is to run to Barnes and Noble and stock up on self-esteem books. Read them, digest them, believe the positive, don't believe what others have told you. Good luck with that. It's a masquerade party; a charade. You can't fool your mind for that long. The problem is you're trying to solve a problem in the wrong arena!
6. What is at least one way that you could be a blessing to someone else?

DAY 3: Value in Community

George Bailey thinks his problems are *his* problems and his life is *his* life. That's how millions of people live their lives; and they think that's a good thing, that that's somehow noble. It turns out that George Bailey is part of something much bigger than himself. He **belongs** in **Bedford Falls**. That's a significant role in his importance, not something he did to prove himself.

1 Cor. 12:11 All these (gifts) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1. How do our gifts get "activated?" How do they become effective?

2. Maybe you think, "But what I have to offer seems so small, so unimportant."

What would Paul have to say to you?

3. You are not the judge of your gifts. Do not trust your judgment for the importance of your gifts. Your gifts are:

(a) GIVEN (it's perverse to judge them as if you had something to do with them).

Have you been tempted to doubt the importance of your gifts or your value?

(b) EMPOWERED by the Holy Spirit. Even if you gave yourself your own gifts to use, and could pick the "best" gifts (in your mind), they'd be utterly useless without dependence on God.

1 Cor. 12:12 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.

4. What is Paul's main point in this verse?

5. How does the illustration of a body and its many body parts illustrate his point?

6. Your hands are valuable to you just because they are *your* hands. Your feet are valuable to you, just because they are *your* feet! God looks at His body parts, YOU(!) in the same way!!!!

DAY 4: Community: Equals Among Many

1 Cor. 12:13 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.

1. People tend to clump themselves into groups. Each group has a "quasi-status/importance" in our minds. Some are important; others are less important, or so we think. But in Christ, what is the truth, from God's point of view?

2. When our pride is "active" we run off comparing ourselves with people around us. The results are predictable. We will either feel superior or inferior, depending on whom we are around. That's a roller coaster ride nobody needs. Look back at 1 Cor. 12:13. How should the truth of this verse affect our propensity to compare ourselves with others?

1 Cor. 12:14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

3. How do these verses illustrate the foolishness of comparing ourselves with others?

4. Are there parts of His body that are less important than other parts? (v. 15)

5. Are there parts of His body that have a right to dismiss themselves from His body? (v. 16)

1 Cor. 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

6. We all imagine that if we just had a "more important role" than we'd feel more important. How does v. 17 deal with that lie?

7. We shoot ourselves in the foot with our own pride and comparison. Pray that you not do that!

DAY 5: The Fight to Build Community

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

1. What do you think Paul means by walking "in a manner worthy of the calling...?"

2. Paul elaborated on what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the calling...

Eph. 4:2... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ...

3. Is this what you had in mind? Paul is talking about how we treat each other! Which of these qualities strikes you the most?

4. How we treat each other is important, but relationships have a higher purpose. Look how Paul finishes this sentence...

Eph. 4:3... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

5. Community doesn't just "happen." Jot down your thoughts next to each of these words:

a. "Eager" -

b. "Maintain" -

c. "Unity" -

d. "Bond" -

e. "Peace" -

6. People in the world think their attitudes are shaped by the people they are around. That is *initially* true, but it doesn't have to stay that way! Ultimately, these verses tell us that we are the shapers of our own attitudes!

a. Do you need an "attitude check?"

b. Which of the qualities do you need to put into practice?

c. Finish with prayer, surrendering your pride to God, and seeking to reflect His Spirit to people.