

How the Called Out Came Together

The One Another Life of the Early Church

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Introduction

The New Testament speaks of the church in two directions at once. Christ calls people out of the world, and then he calls them together. The word *ekklēsia*, which we translate "church," literally names a people called out. But a called-out people is still a gathered people. Christians who belong to Christ also belong to one another.

Luke shows this from the first moments of the church in Jerusalem:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (Acts 2:42-44)

They were together. They shared what they had. Worship, meals, and learning ran through the same households. What began in Jerusalem continued in every city the gospel reached, because the gospel itself is never a private thing. It creates a family.

That is what this quarter is about. Our congregational theme for 2026 is *Knit Together in Love*, drawn from Paul's prayer for the Colossians "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love" (Col 2:2). Knitting is patient work. Strands are drawn through, over, and around each other until what was separate becomes one cloth. That image fits the church. The threads are the people. The hand that does the knitting is the Spirit. The pattern is set by Christ himself.

Across thirteen lessons we will follow three arcs: the heart that makes life together possible, the hands that put love into action, and the growth that carries the body forward over time. Each movement opens with a Scripture anchor and a guiding question, and each lesson fills out one facet of the "one another" life of the New Testament.

Movement One: The Heart

How Do We See One Another?

Before the church does anything, the church must see and feel something. Paul tells the Colossians to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and above all to put on love (Colossians 3:12-14). These are garments believers deliberately wear. The first four lessons work from the inside out: seeing each other through God's eyes, genuine care, correcting with love, and encouraging one another. Every practice in the weeks ahead depends on what is built in these first four.

Movement Two: The Hands

What Does Love Look Like in Action?

The inward life shows up in visible work. Paul writes:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:3-5)

Six lessons trace the early church's actions. They welcomed outsiders. They used their gifts. They seized opportunities to serve. They humbled themselves in concrete ways. They gave generously from what they had. They honored one another with real deference. The anchor is Christ himself, the one who did not grasp at equality with God but emptied himself.

Movement Three: The Growing Body

How Does the Body Keep Growing?

A healthy body grows. The final three lessons ask what faithful growth looks like over time. The early church was willing to change when Scripture and the Spirit redirected it. The Bereans received the word with all eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to test what was being taught (Acts 17:11). Hebrews tells believers to remember those who led them, imitate their faith, and obey and submit to them (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Teachability, willingness to change, and respect for godly leadership are not separate virtues. They are the habits that keep a congregation pointed in the right direction.

How to Use This Workbook

Each lesson opens with the main Scripture text quoted in full, works through the biblical material, and closes with questions that move from comprehension toward application. Come prepared. Read the text in advance. Bring a pen and a Bible. The aim is not to get through the material. It is to let the material get through to us.

A Final Word

Many of our congregations are places where these practices are alive. This class is not a rescue operation. It is a sharpening. Thirteen weeks together is an opportunity to name what is already happening among us, to strengthen what needs strengthening, and to recover what may have drifted. When the called-out truly come together in love, humility, and purpose, the church becomes what God designed it to be: a visible witness to the glory of his kingdom on earth.

MOVEMENT ONE

The Heart

How Do We See One Another?

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. — Colossians 3:12-14

Before the church does anything together, the church must see and feel something together. Paul writes to people who already belong to Christ and tells them to put something *on*. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. Patience. These aren't moods that happen to us. They're garments we deliberately wear. The first four lessons work from the inside out: how we see one another through God's eyes, what genuine care looks like when it isn't performed, how correction becomes an act of love rather than a weapon, and how encouragement keeps hearts from hardening. Every practice in the quarter ahead depends on the attitudes built in these four weeks. Love is what binds it all together, and that binding is the heart of what "knit together in love" really means.

LESSON 1

Seeing Each Other Through God's Eyes

Whose eyes do we use?

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

— 2 Corinthians 5:14-17.

Whose Eyes?

EVERY PERSON IN THE CHURCH SEES EVERY OTHER PERSON THROUGH SOME SET OF EYES. There is no neutral looking. The only question is which set of eyes is doing the work.

Paul answers that question in verse 16. *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.* Something happened that changed how Christians look at people. What happened was Christ, crucified and raised. Everything Paul says in verses 16 and 17 flows out of verses 14 and 15. The love of Christ controls us. One has died for all. Those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them. When the gospel lands, the eyes change.

This lesson opens a thirteen-week study of how the early church lived together under the lordship of Christ. Before anything else comes the question of sight. How the body sees itself determines what the body becomes. If the eyes fail, the practices that follow will fail with them. If the eyes see truly, the practices take their proper shape.

Paul's From Now On

Paul writes "from now on" because there is a before and an after.

Before, the normal way to measure a person was by the categories everyone uses. Family. Nationality. Wealth. Competence. Looks. Reputation. None of that is unusual. It is the way the world has always sorted people, and it is the way every one of us once sorted them. The categories feel accurate because most of them are accurate about something. A man's income really does tell you about his job. A woman's manner really does communicate something about her upbringing. The categories are not imagined.

After, those categories have not disappeared. But they no longer rule the Christian's vision. After the cross, Paul says, we regard no one according to the flesh. A new set of eyes has been given, and the old categories stand in their proper, minor place.

The text does not ask whether we *notice* the flesh. Of course we notice it. The text asks whether we *regard* people by it. To regard someone is to render a verdict on them. It is to decide what they are worth, what they deserve, and how they should be treated. Paul's claim is that the cross has taken that verdict out of the flesh's hands. It belongs to Christ now.

How We Used to See Christ

In the next part, Paul says something we must not miss. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Paul once saw Jesus of Nazareth through the world's eyes. A carpenter's son. A Galilean. An unaccredited teacher. A blasphemer in the judgment of the Sanhedrin. A criminal crucified by Rome. Every one of those categories was accurate about something. None of them was the truth.

Paul openly admitted this. He had seen Christ according to the flesh and missed him entirely. This should get our attention. If flesh categories were powerful enough to blind Saul of Tarsus to the Son of God, those same categories will blind anyone to anyone. The man two rows back whose accent grates. The woman whose past keeps coming up in conversations. The teenager whose clothes and manner read as trouble. The preacher whose preaching style feels dated. Each of them, measured by the flesh, will be measured wrongly. Christ himself was measured wrongly by the best of the flesh's instruments.

The first move of Christian sight is humility about what the flesh sees. The eyes that missed Christ will miss the brother.

The Categories the Flesh Uses

The world teaches the church to evaluate people by four categories, and the church is tempted to import each of them.

Status. The world ranks. It sorts by title, wealth, education, and influence, and it assigns value accordingly. A church that imports this will seat the prominent member up front and keep the poor member at a polite distance, and James 2 will have to be written again. Status is not nothing, but it is not everything, and it cannot rank souls for whom Christ died.

Appearance. The world looks and decides. It reads clothing, bearing, attractiveness, and age, and it forms a verdict before a word has been spoken. A church that imports this will welcome the well-dressed and keep a careful distance from the visitor who looks like trouble. 1 Samuel 16:7 still stands. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Usefulness. The world values the useful and overlooks the rest. It pays attention to those who produce and quietly writes off those who cannot. A church that imports this will pour care into members who serve on committees and overlook the elderly widow who no longer brings a casserole to the fellowship

meal. Paul's body imagery in 1 Corinthians 12 exists to kill this instinct. The parts that seem weaker are indispensable (1 Corinthians 12:22). Usefulness is not the measure.

Grievance. The world remembers hurts and files people under them. It keeps a ledger of who said what, who did what, who was there when it mattered and who was not. A church that imports this will mistake memory for discernment. Love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). The ledger must go.

These four can be named more simply. The flesh sees the outside. The Spirit sees the person.

New Creation

Paul moves in verse 17 to the ground of Christian sight.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

This is not sentiment. It is a statement about what Christ has accomplished. The person in Christ has been brought into something new. Old belongs to the age that is dying. New belongs to the age Christ inaugurated at the resurrection. The Christian is not an improved version of the old self. The Christian is a new creature standing on the ground of a new creation.

If that is what a brother is, then measuring him by what he used to be misreads him. Measuring him by what the flesh sees misreads him. To treat the person next to us as merely what he was is to refuse the gospel at the level of sight.

This does not mean the church pretends people are other than they are. It does not mean old patterns and old failures never come up. It means the primary identity of every brother and sister is settled. In Christ. New creation. Anything else the church sees stands under that reality, not above it.

Seeing the Body

The anchor text for this arc of the quarter comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14)

Notice what Paul calls the Colossians before he asks anything of them. God's chosen ones. Holy and beloved. That is what they are in Christ. The commands come after the identity. Compassionate hearts. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. Patience. Forgiveness. These are what the church puts on when the church sees itself the way God sees it.

The order is decisive. Identity first. Behavior after. A church that puts on compassion while measuring its members by the flesh will end up performing compassion rather than practicing it. A church that puts on kindness without seeing new creation in the next seat will be kind by policy. But a church that takes the gospel into its eyes can put on these garments genuinely, because these garments are the natural clothing of people who see one another as God sees them

Why This Lesson Must Come First

Thirteen weeks lie ahead. Genuine care. Loving correction. Encouragement. Welcome. Service. Humility. Generosity. Honor. Willingness to change. Hunger to learn. Respect for leaders. Every one of those practices depends on the sight being corrected in this opening lesson.

Care becomes performance when the caregiver is measuring the recipient by the flesh. Correction becomes harshness when the corrector sees the fallen brother as an offender rather than a new creation. Encouragement becomes cheap when the encourager is speaking to a category rather than a person. Welcome becomes selective when the host ranks guests by appearance. Every "one another" command in the New Testament presupposes a people who already see one another rightly.

That is why the first part of our study focuses on the heart. Before the hands do the work, the heart has to see. The order matters.

Looking to Jesus

Paul's "from now on" rests on what Jesus himself did and taught. Before Paul ever wrote to Corinth, Jesus had already shown the church what it looks like to see people the way God sees them.

Jesus's sight is one of the quiet themes of the Gospels. He saw the crowds and was moved with compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He looked at the rich young ruler and loved him, even knowing the man would walk away (Mark 10:21). He saw Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree and spoke to him by name before Zacchaeus said a word (Luke 19:5). Repeatedly the Gospels record his gaze, and every time it runs ahead of anyone else's.

The clearest place where Jesus makes the sight-question explicit is Luke 7, in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

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." (Luke 7:44)

Simon had been looking at her the whole time and had not seen her. He had seen a category. A sinful woman. The kind of woman no respectable rabbi should let touch him. He had seen her reputation, her past, her shame, and everything except *her*. Jesus had to turn his host's face toward her and ask the direct question: *do you see this woman?* This is precisely what Paul means by regarding someone according to the flesh. Jesus corrects it at the source.

Jesus also taught on the subject with unmistakable words.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Matthew 7:1-3)

Jesus does not forbid all sight of a brother's sin. He forbids the sight that comes from an eye still full of the log. Self-awareness must come first, or every verdict on a brother will be warped by the verdict-

maker's own blindness. Paul says the same thing in a different key. Regard no one according to the flesh, including yourself.

The deepest point about Jesus's sight is that it was never only diagnosis. Jesus saw people truly, and what he saw moved him toward them, not away. The Pharisees' sight led them to keep a safe distance from sinners. Jesus's sight led him into the house of Simon, into the home of Zacchaeus, into the streets where the harassed crowds walked. Seeing truly and drawing near are one motion in him.

The church lives into that motion. To see the body the way Jesus sees the body is also to move toward the body. That is where the second movement of this quarter is headed. Jesus has done both already, and his life is the template.

Final Encouraging Word

A congregation gathered on a Sunday morning is not a room of categories. *It is a room of new creations.* Each person who has come to Christ and been buried with him in baptism has been raised into a new life the flesh cannot see. That is what God has done. Christ died for all, therefore all died, and those who live now live through him. The brother two rows up and the sister across the aisle are what the gospel says they are.

The eyes of faith take some growing into. Nobody is born with them. Paul was not born with them. Peter was not born with them. The early church learned to see one another with them by living close to the one who had seen each of them truly when no one else did.

Pray for those eyes. Then act like a person who has them. Every practice taken up this quarter grows out of that sight. Compassionate hearts. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. Patience. Forgiveness. Love that binds everything in perfect harmony. These are the clothes of people who have learned to see.

The called-out come together not because they happen to get along, but because they have finally learned to see one another the way their Lord sees them. That is where the quarter begins. Everything else follows from there.

For Discussion

1. Paul says Christians "regard no one according to the flesh." What does it mean to *regard* a person, and how is that different from simply noticing things about them?
2. Paul admits he once regarded Christ according to the flesh. What did that look like for him before the Damascus road, and what changed? How does his own history shape the warning he gives in 2 Corinthians 5:16?

3. The lesson names four flesh-categories the church is tempted to import: status, appearance, usefulness, and grievance. Which of the four is most quietly at work in a typical congregation, and why is it so hard to see?

4. Colossians 3:12 calls Christians to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Why does Paul begin with who they are ("chosen ones, holy and beloved") before telling them what to wear? What happens to the putting-on if that order is reversed?

5. Think of a brother or sister in the body you find difficult to see clearly. What flesh-category is doing the most work in how you regard that person? What would it look like to see them instead as a new creation, whatever else remains true of them?

6. This quarter assumes that every "one another" command depends on how the church sees itself. What one practical change in your own sight this week would best prepare you for the twelve lessons that follow?