

When we are thinking about what it means to be a Christian, where do we usually start? If I had to guess, we'd probably start with ourselves, thinking about how I should live as a Christian. I should do this, I should not do that, and so forth. Which, of course, is just fine. It's perfectly natural. We should think about what it means to be a Christian as we live our daily lives. But Christians, being a Christian does not start with "I." Being a Christian starts with "we." We are the body of Christ. We are united in the Lord. We have the same hope. We have the same Lord. We are being saved with the same salvation. Even the Lord's Prayer starts with "our Father." It doesn't start with "my Father." So when we think about what it means to be a Christian, we need to think first of all in terms of "we," and then we can think in terms of "I." But how does that shape how we understand what Paul is saying in our reading for today? How does that change the way that we look at being a Christian in all of our lives?

Now, I only ask this question because of one very unusual thing that we do in the English language that no other language does. And that is, we use the same word when we're talking to an individual as when we are talking to a group of people. And that word is "you." I could be talking to you individually, or I could be talking to you together as a group. And I know most of the time we know which one we mean, because most the time we can tell. But every now and then, it's not quite so clear, especially when it's something that we're reading, something that is written down. What does this actually mean? Are we talking to you individually or are we talking to you as a group? Because listen to what Paul says in verse 17 of our reading: "Now, this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds." So who is the "you"? Is Paul talking to you personally, to you individually, that you must not walk as the Gentiles do? Or is he talking to you, all of you, that we should not walk as the Gentiles do? In Greek, in the original language, it's perfectly clear. Paul is talking to all of us. It is you plural. You all must no longer walk in this way. And in fact, every time we hear the word "you" or "your" in this passage, they're all plural. Paul is talking to us as the one body, to all of us together, not just as individual Christians.

And the reason why that's important for us to keep in mind is that it makes us think about what we're doing. Because when I think in terms of "us" first and "me" second, then I have to look carefully at what I'm doing. I have to look at how I'm actually living as a group. But when I think about "me" first and "us" second, I can deceive myself, convince myself that I'm something that I'm actually not. Because honestly, Christians, there is no one that I go easier on, there is no one that I make more excuses for than myself. I can convince myself that I'm doing just fine, that I'm doing what God wants me to do. Yeah, I'm not perfect, but then again nobody is. But I'm doing the best that I can, and surely that's good enough. So when I look at my life, I'd say I'm doing all right. My lies that I tell, they're not that bad. My anger, it's not that bad either. The things that I say, they're not that bad. And I have a good reason for doing what I did, even if it's not exactly what God wanted me to do. So, all told, I'm doing okay. Yeah, I could be better, but overall, I'd give myself a B, maybe even an A- when it comes to being a Christian. It is so easy for us to convince ourselves that we are doing better than we actually are.

But Paul is not talking to just me. He is not talking to just you individually. He is talking to us together as the body of Christ. And when we remember that, it's not so easy to deceive ourselves. Because I can tell myself anything, but when I have to deal with somebody else, the truth comes out. I can tell myself anything, but eventually the truth of my heart will show itself, and I will be

seen for what I actually am. And so Paul tells us that "you all must no longer walk like the Gentiles." And now, think, Christians, together: are we living like the world towards one another? Are we living like the Gentiles? Are we acting callous and unfeeling towards each other, so that I don't really care about what the other person wants? Are we living for pleasure, living for ourselves, especially at the expense of someone else? Are we seeking after impurity, seeking after the things of this world rather than the things of God? Or to put it a different way, are we living as though we have never heard the name of Christ? Because think about what Jesus says, John chapter 13: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus does not say that people will know that you are Christians because you claim to be a Christian. Jesus does not say that people will know that you are Christians if you just say that you are one. Jesus says that people will know that you are Christians by the love which you have for one another. It is love that makes us a Christian. It is love that shows that we belong to the Lord.

And for that reason, Paul says to us, verse 22: "To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires." And another way to translate that "put off your old self" is "to put off the old man." And the old man refers to our sinful nature, that sin which we inherited from Adam and that which makes us sinners. And the old man, Christians, lives in the world. The old man only wants to please himself. The old man only loves himself. He only lives for himself. The old man thinks in terms of "I" and "me" and "my" first and foremost, and never in terms of "we." And we can see the old man at work, Christians, when we live like the world towards one another. We can see the old man when we refuse to talk to one another. We can see the old man when we gossip about each other. We can see the old man when we fight with one another. The old man is how the Gentiles live. Is that how we live as Christians in the Church?

But this is not who you are anymore. Put off the old man, Paul says. In fact, he goes on to say: "And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." And again, you can translate "put on the new self" as "put on the new man." And the new man, Christians, is Jesus Christ. We have put him on when we were baptized into him. In Christ, we are a new creation. In Christ, we are one body. In Christ, we are like God, righteous and holy. So Paul calls for us to put on the new man in the way that we talk to one another. Put on the new man in the way that we act with one another. Put on the new man in the way that we live towards one another. In other words, follow after Jesus in everything, living as the Christians that he has made us to be.

And in case there was any confusion, in case we wanted to understand perfectly what that meant--to put off the old man, to put on the new--Paul shows us in the last part of our reading. Paul calls on us as Christians to put away falsehood, to not lie to one another, but to speak the truth with each other, because we belong to Christ. Paul tells us that it's okay to be angry. It's okay to be angry, but be angry for the right reasons. Because when we're angry for the wrong reason, we only want things our way. We only want things the way that we want them. We're only interested in ourselves. But when we're angry for the right reason, we are angry and seeking after the truth. It's okay to be angry about sin. It's okay to be angry about things that tear us apart. But also don't dwell on that anger. Don't hold onto it just to be angry. But instead don't let the sun go down on it. Fix it. Resolve the issue. Seek to build up the body of Christ, and in that way we will not give

an opportunity to the devil to tear us apart. Paul tells us to speak things that are good, to not speak things that are empty and have no value, because in that way we will all be built up together in the Lord. Paul calls on us to not grieve the Holy Spirit by acting the way that the world does towards one another. And the reason for that, Christians, is because you were bought with a price. God paid a very high price for your salvation: the blood of his own Son, Jesus Christ. It cost Jesus his life to save you. And if we treat expensive things with care just because they're expensive, how much more so should we treat our salvation with care, because it is the most expensive thing of all? Paul calls on us to put away all bitterness, to put away all slander. Be kind to one another as God the Father in Christ has been kind to you. Be tenderhearted to one another as God the Father in Christ has had compassion on you. Forgive one another as God the Father in Christ has forgiven you. In a word, Christians, in a nutshell, be like Jesus to one another, because that is who we are called to be in him.

So therefore, don't start with "I" and "me" and "my" when it comes to being a Christian. Start with "us" and "we" and "ours," because we are the one body of Jesus Christ our Lord. Put off the old man, Christians. That is not who you are anymore. But put on the new man, put on Jesus Christ, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Love one another as God has first loved you in his Son. And in this way, we will live as the Christians that he has called us to be.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have brought us together in the one body of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to walk with one another in love so that we may glorify you in all that we say and think and do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.