

## The Recipients of Incorporation

### 1 Cor. 12:12-31a

#### INTRODUCTION:

A seminary professor heard someone say, "I don't believe in organized religion." He responded, "Come to the Lutheran church. You will feel right at home."

There is some truth in this little joke. Lutherans do not lay as much stress as other churches do on particular patterns of church government or organization, for no one form of church government is instituted by God.

However, Lutherans keenly recognize the true unity of the church and of what it consists (The preacher might quote Augsburg Confession VII).

As we saw last week, incorporation in the body of Christ has its source in God. This week, we follow Paul into the rest of 1 Corinthians 12, where he emphasizes those who receive this incorporation. INCORPORATION HAS ITS RECIPIENTS IN OUR FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

- 1) Church members are brought into one body (vv. 12-13)
  - a. "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" (v. 12)
    - i. Maybe you were expecting that sentence to end: "so it is with the church," but the sentence mentions the Lord instead. See how close is the tie between Christ and His church! The text points to Baptism as a tie incorporating us into Christ's body the church.
    - ii. People speak of death as "the great leveler." Well, Baptism is the great leveler between us in the church, for through it we have died with Christ . . . and have been raised with Him.
  - b. We live under the headship of Christ.
    - i. By ourselves, we have a terrible sort of Midas' touch – everything fragments when we get our hands on it. Only in Christ is the fractured creation put together (Col. 1:19-20).
    - ii. He is the Head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18): the Lord from whom the church receives life. Where He is, He is there in His fulness – also in each local congregation. Every congregation has the full dignity of being the church of Christ and the gateway to heaven.
- 2) Church members relate to one another in the body of Christ (vv. 14-27)
  - a. United, but not uniform
    - i. "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (v. 14; see Rom. 12:4-5). A foot is not a hand, nor is an ear an eye, etc.
    - ii. Here lies the weakness of the term "assimilation": Literally, it means *to make things similar*. The church is not like that, though. Its members are not like

checkers in a checker set. Rather, we resemble more the components of a monopoly game. While these various components are all obviously different, yet they are still parts of the same set nonetheless.

iii. In the church there is no place for rivalry. Members should not be seen as inferior because they do not do something eye-catching.

b. Different, but not dispensable

i. Nor should the more “glamorous” members try to pass themselves off as superior. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (v. 21). No prima donnas!

ii. Each member has a purpose, and all their gifts should be harnessed for the ongoing building of the church through God’s Word.

iii. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (v. 26).

#### CONCLUSION:

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (v. 27). What could be better than being a church “member,” a member of the body of Christ?

This contrasts greatly with membership in some club: “. . . speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when every part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).

We will follow St. Paul as he goes on about love next week.

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