

What's the Message – Lesson 127

Come with us now as we continue our search for guidance regarding the church as the body of Christ.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Our prayer today is excerpted from the new Lutheran Study Bible: Lord, we ask that You would mute our idolatrous pride and curb our selfish will. Instead, combine our hearts in works that praise You, even as You unite our voices in the true confession of Your name. Amen.

Last time we saw Paul's instructions regarding giving offense, and our proper participation at the Lord's Supper. In this lesson we receive his advice on two more subjects: the Church as the body of Christ, and how the Church should reflect the love of Christ.

But even these two points have sub-points. We might say that Paul gives our first topic a preface, by comparing the several members of a human body to the variety of gifts given to the Church. Dale, please read verses 4 - 7 of chapter 12 of 1st Corinthians:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Paul expands this idea of a variety of capabilities in the rest of the verses in chapter 12 by considering the various members of a human body.

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. . . . For the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . 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? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose. . . . As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Then Paul concludes this section by saying that God has arranged the parts of a human body in such a way that there would be no division, and that each part cares for the rest.

And he summarizes with these words in verse 25: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

This is how the Church is to work – in harmony, together, each one caring for the other and taking the varieties of gifts the Holy Spirit has endowed us with to build a total that is greater than the simple sum of its parts. And now Paul leads us into the second of the two points we consider today, how the Church is to reflect the love of Christ. He says: *And I will show you a still more excellent way.* Dale, please read chapter 13.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect, but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Teacher, what's the message Paul wants us to learn here?

Go back to the statement made at the beginning of this lesson; "The Church is the body of Christ, and is to reflect the love of Christ." Paul has shown that the Holy Spirit has granted a wide variety of gifts to the members of the Church, to be used for the building up of the Church, just as all the members of a human body are necessary and work for the growth of that body. This is an illustration of the unity of purpose. But how is that unity to be achieved?

It can only be achieved if we are imitators of Christ, and reflect the love of Christ in our lives. Love is to be the motivation for all of our relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters. And in this beautiful chapter 13, Paul explains to us what that kind of love really means.

Next time we shall look at Paul's words on the resurrection of the dead.