

SHEPHERD'S SENSE

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (I Corinthians 1:10).

This may very well be the single most difficult action the Christian is called to perform. As Christians, we are called to love our families, our neighbors, our fellow Christians, even our enemies. As Christians, we are called to lay down our lives for our Savior, as well as our pride and our plans for our lives. As Christians, we are called to be witnesses for our Lord of His gracious love and care for all people. Yes, all of that, and more are we called to in our Christian life and walk. But to expect us to agree with others, that is often just too much and is far too risky!

In order for us to agree, we must truly hear one another, truly listen. I must hear what you believe and think, not what I think you believe and think. I need to believe that you are as sincere in your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and as led by the Holy Spirit as am I. Your faith is as genuine as mine, and as dearly held. And you are as honest and trustworthy as I am – maybe more so. And, for us to agree, you must grant to me (notice, I don't ask to 'earn' this, I cannot earn this, I can only lose it) that which I grant to you – to ascribe to me the motives of truth and love, of sincerity, genuineness, honesty and trustworthiness. Then we can begin to close the divisions that separate us.

A professor of mine, the Rev. Dr. Ed Schroeder, reminded us often of the 'risk' of faith. The risk is that in openly speaking and listening, I may become convinced of the rightness of your proclamation. My faith then is changed to look more like yours. I risk my vision of the faith every time I share it with you. But only in that open sharing do I grow stronger in my faith - even as it changes. Only in openly sharing do you become stronger in your faith. Only in the risk of openness is there any chance that we can 'agree with one another'.

Beloved, it is so easy to agree to disagree, and so bring pain and dishonor to our God and Savior. The disdain of the world toward the Church is proverbial. The world listens not, for what voice should it recognize from the Christian cacophony? But the risk of faith, that is what Paul asks of us. And in so risking, we hear one another, we are changed, and begin to speak with one voice, speaking that which is central to us all, 'united in mind and thought'.

Pastor Bruce