

Agree with One Another
LaGrave Christian Reformed Church
November 7, 2021-AM Service
Reverend Peter Jonker
1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Today's 'one another' is 'agree with one another.' That's a 'one another' found in 1 Corinthians 1:10. Let me re-read that verse, and as I do, I want you to reflect on this question: How hopeful are you that we will be able to accomplish what Paul asks us to do here? Is this doable? "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." Agree with one another. No divisions. Perfectly united in mind and thought. 'Lord you want us to agree in all things? You want us to be perfectly united in mind and thought? Is such a thing possible!?"

And this isn't the only place where the New Testament calls us to this kind of unity. Romans 15:5-6: "Have the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind you may glorify God." 1 Peter 3:8: "Finally all of you be like-minded." 2 Corinthians 13:1: "Finally brothers and sisters, 'be of one mind, live in peace.'" And finally Acts 4:32 when Luke describes the state of the early church he says: "All the believers were one in heart and mind." Agreeing with one another. Like mindedness. These are consistent themes in the New Testament. We are called to agreement. How are we supposed to do this?! We disagree about so many things! Politics, Covid policy, race relations, LGBT. We are not good at agreeing with one another.

We've never been good at agreeing with one another. In fact, we are often good at the opposite, we're good at finding one thing we disagree about and making that one thing a cause of fights and schisms. In early October 1529–12 years after Martin Luther had nailed his 95 theses on the door of Wittenberg Cathedral—a group of Reformation leaders got together in Marburg, Germany for what historians call the Marburg Colloquy. The goal of the meeting was to bring reformers together in common cause. The main participants were Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther, but some other big names of the Reformation were also there: Philip Melancthon, Martin Bucer, and others. The participants wrote 15 articles of faith with the hope that all could sign them and they could move forward with one accord as brothers in Christ. The hope was they could agree with one another.

In the end they agreed on almost everything. They agreed about the nature of the atonement, original sin, salvation by grace through faith. They agreed on 14 out of 15 of the articles. They agreed on most parts of the 15th article. The only thing they couldn't agree on was the nature of the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper. Luther believed that Christ's body was actually present beside the bread, around the bread, a view called consubstantiation. Zwingli had a more symbolic view. He believed that the body with Christ was present in the Lord's Supper in the sense that the church was there and the church is Christ's body. This one point of disagreement was enough for Luther to question whether or not Zwingli was a true brother in Christ. As he left the colloquy, he is reported to have said, "Your spirit and our spirit cannot go together. Indeed, it is quite obvious that we do not have the same spirit." One point of disagreement out of 15, and that one point was enough for them to question whether or not they were of the same faith. This is what we do. This is what we have always done. We've done it so often that we hear the call to agree with one another, to be perfectly united in mind and thought, and we say, 'Lord, increase our faith!'

What shall we say about this? Well for one thing we can put this hard verse in context. Every commentator that I read this week agreed, when Paul calls us to agree with one another, he is not calling for complete uniformity of opinion on all things. Paul is not saying that every vote at every committee meeting and council meeting and congregational meeting must be 100% for and zero against. When you read verse 10 by itself it might sound that way, but Paul clearly doesn't expect 100% agreement about all things.

We can see that in other passages. Later in Corinthians, Paul acknowledges that people in the church have different opinions about whether or not to eat meat that has been offered to idols. Some people say, "An idol is nothing. They have no power. They're just pieces of stone. They can't corrupt meat so of course we can eat it! Others say, "no an idol is a wicked thing, so we should not eat that meat." Paul's solution to this debate is not getting everyone to agree. Paul doesn't seek uniformity of opinion. Paul tells them that they should give room to each other's differences. Out of love, everyone should seek use their freedom to build others up.

In Romans 14:5, Paul makes it even more obvious that we don't have to agree about everything. In an effort to keep the church united in love he says, "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind." Some people approach feast days this way. Some people approach feast days that way. Don't judge each other because of these differences. "*Make every effort to do what leads to peace.*" So Paul is not calling us to lockstep uniformity. Christian unity is not groupthink. It's not mindless, robotic agreement.

But what is it then? How should we understand Paul in verse 10? If he's not asking for total agreement on all matters, what is he asking for when he says agree with one another and be perfectly united in mind and thought?

As I was reflecting on this question this week, I found myself remembering something Rich Mouw once wrote. In his book *Calvinism at the Las Vegas Airport*, Mouw tries to explain what he means when he tells people he is a Calvinist. Mouw used to be president of Fuller Seminary. When he was president, all sorts of Christians went to that institution, charismatics and evangelicals and Baptists and Reformed and Presbyterian. Lots of different people with lots of doctrinal disagreements. In that environment, people would find out that he called himself a Calvinist, and some of those people who were not Calvinists said something like, "A Calvinist?! Why, in heavens name, do you call yourself a Calvinist?!" Mouw would reply to that by saying, "First of all I am a human being, and I share that commonality with all people created in God's image. But I am convinced that the best way to be a

human being is to follow Jesus Christ, to be a Christian. And I find the best way to be a Christian is to be a Protestant. And the best way for me to be a Protestant is to be Reformed. And I find the best way to be Reformed is to be a Calvinist.

Do you see what he's doing there? He builds a tower of agreement. He starts from the broadest area of agreement and commonality and he makes distinctions up from there. You could go further up the tower. You could have said, "And for me, the best way of being Calvinist is being Christian Reformed, and the best way of being Christian Reformed is going to LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church." I like this approach. I think Paul would like this approach. It's a winsome approach. Instead of starting with the differences, instead of starting with the doctrine of election, or predestination or something like that, Mouw starts with all the points of agreement. He builds a tower of agreement, focusing on all the areas of commonality before he finally arrives at the differences.

So often, when we identify ourselves, we start with points of difference. You see this a lot in the conversations among our denominational cousins. The Protestant Reformed. Oh yeah they don't believe in common grace and they split with us over that issue back in the 20's. The Presbyterian Church of America—yeah they don't ordain women like we do. The Presbyterian Church USA—yeah, they are more liberal than us on the LGBT issue. I don't think it would be true anymore, but back when I was 15, if you'd asked the members of my catechism class to describe a Catholic, they would have said, "Catholics are people who believe in transubstantiation and they pray to Mary." These are all true statements, but they all start at the top of the tower. They all start with difference. Instead of starting at the bottom with all the profound things we share, instead of starting at the bottom with all the foundational things we have in common, we start at the top with the differences.

It's a little bit like the framing I talked about last week. Sometimes the hurt people give to us becomes the primary frame in which we see them. 'That's the person who hurt me.' If that's our frame it will lead us to bitterness towards the other person. Sometimes it leads to bitterness becoming the frame for our whole life. Here, difference becomes our frame. Martin Luther looks at Ulrich Zwingli and thinks, 'that's the guy who has that bad view of the Lord's Supper. He is of a different spirit.' We frame people in terms of the disagreements higher up the tower and we let these differences eclipse all the ways in which we are the same. These higher level disagreements are important. We shouldn't ignore them. We should talk about them. But they should not be our primary frame.

When Paul calls for agreement, he's speaking about foundational things. It looks like the Corinthian church has been fighting about things higher up the tower. They are all fighting about their favorite preachers. Who's the better speaker, Paul, Cephas, Apollos? Paul says, 'What are you doing!? You weren't baptized into my name; you were baptized into Christ. It's not about me, or Cephas or Apollos, it's about Jesus. It's about the cross of Christ.' Chapter 2:1-2 "When I came to you I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom (stuff higher up the tower) I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (that's the foundation.)" Paul wants us to start at the bottom of the tower. Paul wants us to start on our knees at the cross. Because when we are on our knees at the cross, watching Jesus die for us, dying so that you can be one in him, these disputes higher up the tower don't seem quite so central. They are still important issues, but they are not where our hope lies.

If Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli had seen each other through the frame of the cross. If they'd seen themselves as broken sinners on their knees before the crucified Jesus, I promise you Luther would not have said, "We are not of the same spirit." They still would have disagreed about communion, but they would have realized their deeper foundational agreement in Christ.

Sometimes, over the last couple of years, as debates about Covid and politics raged around the church, I think we've all looked at each other in terms of things further up the tower. "There's that person who disagrees with me about Covid." As we move forward and talk about the important issues ahead, I pray that we will see each other according to our foundations. I pray that we will see each other as broken sinners on our knees before Jesus, completely dependent on his grace.

When I find myself framing others in terms of these disagreements further up the tower, do you know what really helps me? Worship. Whatever disagreements we may have, on Sunday morning, the introit ends, Larry modulates from the introit to the music of the opening hymn, everyone rises, and we all together sing a hymn of praise to God. As I process down the aisle I see all the members of the church family singing praise to God together: "*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.*" Children, young people, families, singles, all singing. And then I get to the front and I have one of the great privileges of my job, watching this family, this body sing their faith with heart and soul and voice. There are smiles, there are often tears on people's faces, and there is palpable joy. And it is so good because whatever disagreements we may have further up the tower, in that moment we are altogether singing the foundation of our hope. We are singing the love of God which is unshakably ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. *And in that moment we are perfectly united in mind and thought.* And it is good.

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