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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

February 2, 2014

Restoring God's Mission to the Church

*“Now I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ:  
Agree with each other and don't be divided into rival groups.  
Instead, be restored with the same mind and the same purpose.”*  
1 Corinthians 1:10

I have served on the Committee on Ministry at two different times in my ministry. This is the committee of a regional area known as a Presbytery and is responsible for the care and well being of local churches within that particular region. During each period of service, I have worked with a congregation that was experiencing division – either of a theological nature or simply disgruntled members who simply didn't like how things were being done by the leadership. In each case the church lacked vitality simply due to the consuming energy poured into quarrelling with one another. I imagine that such churches bring a smile to the face of Satan. That is because quarrelling distracts the church from passionately pursuing God's mission.

What is unfortunate is that most churches experience some level of disgruntled gossip. One group makes harmful comments about how the pastor spends her time. Another group second-guesses leadership decisions made by the governing board. In every case the result is distraction – distraction from the sole reason God called the church into existence, which is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Usually such quarrelling is nothing more than selfishness. Rather than legitimate concern for advancing God's work, these people are expressing personal hurt or believe their opinion is superior to that of other leaders. And Satan's smile broadens.

This is precisely the trouble the Apostle Paul addresses in the first four chapters of this first of two letters to the church in Corinth. And Paul's attitude and approach is remarkable. There is nothing subtle or indirect in the way he approaches gossip and division. With considerable courage, Paul “calls-out” this bad behavior and reminds the church of its primary reason for existence; the church is not for championing personal desires and preferences but for advancing God's work in the world. Frankly, gossips and complainers are diminishing that work.

It will be helpful for us to examine our own speech and behavior as a member of the faith community called the Church of Jesus Christ. Is God's Kingdom being held in check by our criticism and disrespect of one another? Satan desires that we remain distracted, disrupted and in constant dispute. Such a church fails to offer anything attractive to the world. So Paul urges us to put away such divisions and remember again what it is that called us together in the first place – to know, love and follow Christ Jesus.

*Show us once again, O Lord, that the church is not about us. The church is about Your mission in the world and our participation in that great work. Amen.*

Doug Hood