

5. Open-minded Humility versus Quenching the Spirit

June 30, 2013

I. Open-minded Humility

A. Introduction

1. Need

Discipleship in the church has its pitfalls. It is risky because people often get lost in various views that are contrary to sound doctrine and life. Error is attractive because of sins (past and present), predispositions, biases, social pressures, and presuppositions (beliefs that govern other beliefs; if a governing belief is erroneous, then the control it exerts will lead to more error with misguided confidence and comfort). Nonetheless, exposure to erroneous views is essential to learning the truth for we must work our way to understanding the will of God by testing (Rom 12.2; Phil 1.9-11; this makes demands on both pastors and flocks). Accordingly, the church faces a great challenge in cultivating discipleship that properly includes a calm and fair presentation of alternatives in the process of refuting those that contradict the truth (Titus 1.9).

Furthermore, discipleship functions within the larger context of the responsibility of the church to confess a good confession, and this entails continual reexamination since good does not mean static. If a reformed church is always reforming, then it has its guard up against static confessionalism and dead orthodoxy. Moreover, such rethinking is not just the responsibility of the elders of the church and churches. That is more Romanist than Reformed. Rethinking is the task of the whole church given the sole authority of the Scriptures as our only infallible guide; even collectively elders do not hand the confession to the church like feeding children with a spoon. Local churches are to confess their faith *as they grow* in grace and knowledge of the truth. A pastor in a local setting does not speak for the flock. His job is to teach the gospel precept upon precept; the job of the sheep is to be disciples for holiness to the glory of God.

Thus, for a church to be "reformed" means that the people consciously confess the main tenets of reformed theology believing that the reformed faith is the best interpretation out there among the alternatives. To promote this understanding of the truth, the church covenant requires that office holders subscribe to the main tenets of the reformed faith with emphasis on how salvation is defined by the Canons of Dort along with some disclaimers regarding the remarkably simple yet profoundly difficult subject of the sacraments. I have come to believe that the deep disagreements on the sacraments are due to the profound nature of the biblical teaching about them. This tests our discernment, requires patient diligent study, and calls for love *since both sacraments are signs of Christian unity*. We must learn the truth about the sacraments and we must bend over backwards to accept and appreciate views different from our own. For example, I teach that no matter what view of the candidate for baptism you may believe to be scriptural, you (the church and churches) ought to grant acceptability and validity to the opposing view. Granted, that is a difficult pill for many to swallow, but it goes down more easily (and in a most delightful way) when we earnestly pursue the unity of the Spirit in a bond of peace.

Balancing the discovery of truth and confessing it clearly with the promotion of love and unity are matters of sanctification and they often reveal our great need of sanctifying grace. Consider the combination of principles in a holy life according to Ephesians 4: **I...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,** ² **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,** ³ **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** ⁴ **There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-** ⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** ⁶ **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (1-6).** If we lack one anothering love, we will not only trend against unity in various subtle ways

(isolationism, independence, and autonomy even within the church) but we will also openly divide the church over baptism. To be sure, even the call for unity by granting acceptability and validity causes many to turn away and divide. At that point we must ask ourselves, are we seeking to promote unity by sound principles? If so, then we must leave the responses of others to the Lord, and love them with all humility, gentleness, and patience.

In the end then, *this approach to corporate (local church) confession of faith stands within the mission of the church to be disciples for holiness to the glory of God, and it all accents the need of a cluster of Christian graces summarized under the umbrella of open-minded humility.*

2. Definition

Open-minded humility refers to a cluster of Christian graces that are required to be a critical thinking, testing, and discerning disciple of Christ. In a word, it summarizes the wisdom needed in the process of bringing our thoughts into conformity to God's thoughts. This, of course, requires that we work through disagreements toward the goal of one mindedness. Therefore, OMH is necessary for arguing without quarreling for the sake of unity: **Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel** (Phil 1.27). Note how unity (a. **standing firm in one spirit**, b. **with one mind**, c. **striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**) precedes uniformity (complete agreement) because the striving is **for the faith**, the body of truth to be believed, the object of faith (distinct from the faith by which we believe it). As we know, the need for growth in knowledge of the faith is everywhere in Scripture and the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace must be eagerly maintained (Eph 4.3).

Philippians 1.27 presents us with a significant challenge (daunting; overwhelming; idealistic). It requires a cluster of Christian graces and it hones them. It requires sanctification and it promotes it.