

## 5. Open-minded Humility versus Quenching the Spirit

July 28, 2013

### I. Open-minded Humility

#### A. Introduction (need, definition)

#### B. Humility (acknowledgment, risk, distrust, love)

#### C. Openness

One is not humble if one is not open. Closed-mindedness correlates with pride.

We can outline at least four ingredients in the open-mindedness pie. You are a closed-minded person if these ingredients are not all present (thus, closed to varying degrees).

##### 1. First, you must display a comparative spirit

Acts 17:10-11 suggests adding openness to humbleness. The Jewish Bereans confronted teachings on the Bible that were extremely different from their views to date. Luke describes them to be of "noble character" because they eagerly examined Paul's message. The Berean spirit is a mindset for dealing with conflicts and differences when emotions run high. When something affects us deeply, that is the time when we need clear-headedness the most. In that context, the attitude of the Bereans is a model for Christians to emulate. To be open-minded you must be willing to compare what you think with what others think in the context of searching the Scriptures.

Then you cannot say: "Don't talk to me about religion or politics." "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up." Comparison is up front in openness, even with views we perceive to be wrong! Consider how we view the same facts in different ways in the well-known duck-rabbit illustration in which the viewer sees either a duck or a rabbit, and can adjust his perspective from seeing one to seeing the other. How do we know if we should see a duck or a rabbit (or both)? We must get the point of view of the author of the facts. Developing open-minded humility includes engaging the mind from different perspectives to rule out one and rule in another where necessary. It is usually a process that has fluidity; it involves times of being unsure, or of wavering on an idea, but there is value (and privilege for which to be thankful) in receiving exposure to other views. Exposure for comparison means that we get a rich vein of perspective from church history (past and present, corporate and individual). We get an inside view not just that of an outsider, and our diet is expanded and varied. This is good because variety is a spice to life.

A quote from Silas Mariner illustrates the blind-sidedness we experience when we refuse to disturb ourselves by comparison. "The Squire had been used to parish homage all his life, used to the presupposition that his family, his tankards, and everything that was his, were the oldest and best; and as he never associated with any gentry higher than himself, *his opinion was not disturbed by comparison.*" He eventually faced a rude awakening. If we avoid association with other views, perhaps higher than our own, then we may avoid being disquieted in our walk, but this will only last until we stumble and fall due to our willful blindness.

However, comparison is not enough to ensure true openness. Here is why. You could be willing to compare to tear the opposing view to shreds! Consider how you might listen with a negative spirit to find fault. While sitting outside and pondering this principle, I noticed a spider in a large web in the sun. When I walked over to the huge spider, it slipped behind a leaf. I thought, "What an ugly surprise hides behind that leaf! Open-minded humility will not spin webs to trap others. True openness does not operate with an ugly and feigned piety that tends to hurt and humiliate by showing others wrong and ourselves right. This kind of "piety" hides an ugly

meanness by which we devour people with our words. This ought not to be so because though fallen they are images of God (James 3.10). Therefore, a comparative spirit is not sufficient: we must add empathy to comparison.

## 2. Second, you must engage empathetically

With this quality, you are willing to compare not to destroy, but to look for the good. We need more than comparison. We also need empathy to be truly open. This accentuates comparing that looks for the good; at least some good, however little might be expected. This involves a training of the mind that includes testing all things to hold to the good (1 Thess 5.21) and having your senses exercised to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5.13-14: **for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil**). This is a thought-provoking question to ask in this regard, "Can you meaningfully understand something without empathy toward it (at least some measure of empathy)?" Of course, emphasis in openness is person to person: we empathize with the person who holds a belief, say, like naturalistic evolution that we do not believe to be true. Still, it seems clear that it takes some empathy toward the things the naturalistic evolutionist believes to understand what he thinks and believes and why. If we have no comparative empathy, then the tendency is to miss the good that we may discover in the reports of his work in which as the image of God he will reflect God, even if unwittingly.

Having this in place is still not enough to make one broad-minded because you could say, "Okay, I will compare and do so empathetically, but only one time, you get one crack at it and that's it." The additional quality of dialogue is required for true openness.

## 3. Third you must willingly dialogue

This means that you are willing to compare *repeatedly* knowing that discipleship is a school of life long learning, and that dialogue is good for all because the mutuality texts require it by implication. Since we fail to express things clearly so often in both speaking and listening, then if we jump on to some initial idea that we assume is intended, we may totally miss the point. Just think of it: my wife and I may not understand what each is saying about an issue for a week, but by revisiting the subject repeatedly we finally get on the same page!

Dialogue involves a principle of "counter question and question." What does beginning with "counter question" imply? A process of dialogue is already going on: there is a claim, a question, and a counter question already on the table. Now to the table comes a question regarding the counter question. This is the "Pete and Re-Pete" principle in dialogue over time. They did not build Rome in a day, nor do we edify the people of God in a day. Learning takes time under the teaching of the Holy Spirit through pastors as frail human instruments. Nevertheless, they must work hard to handle the work accurately and to refute that which contradicts the truth (2 Tim 2.14-15, **Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. <sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth; Titus 1.9, He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it**). Most of all, they must do their work with humility, patience, and gentleness without being quarrelsome (2 Tim 2.24-25: **And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth**). In a word, they must argue vigorously without quarreling! All hope is in the grace of God and His gift of repentance.