

Love and Unity

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The accusation is frequently made against the Protestant Reformed Churches that we lack love; we do not express any love for one another, but are always at each other's throats, bickering and disputing over a host of unimportant matters. Many charge that our people are not kind and considerate of those who visit our churches. Indeed, others claim that, because we do not get involved in the problems of the world concerning "man" and "man's needs," we thereby prove that we lack love. And it is claimed, because we lack love, therefore, we do not manifest the unity, the fellowship, the communion that believers should experience with one another in Christ Jesus.

The concept *love* is the crucial standard or criterion on the basis of which we must realize the unity of believers. But many fail or refuse to define the concept love as it would apply to the church. What must I love? Whom must I love? The answers to these questions very definitely form the basis for the unity of believers in Christ Jesus. Christ prayed for the unity, the "oneness," of all them that had been given unto Him (John 17:21). We have, therefore, an obligation before God to manifest in love the "oneness" for which Christ prayed. We may not make light of this obligation. This is far too often done among us. Each one of us, as individuals and as a denomination, has the grave responsibility to manifest the unity of believers, which is ours in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true, of course, that we cannot *now* attain the perfection, the absoluteness, of the unity we have in Christ Jesus. But we must strive for it nonetheless. The basis of that unity is very definitely *love*; but the question is the love of what?

We must not overlook the fact that the Reformed churches have faced this problem before. They were forced to establish a confessional basis for the unity of believers. Our fathers, therefore, have given us a rich heritage. We must establish and maintain the unity of believers in Christ on the basis of the *love* of the Confessions of our Reformed fathers. The Confessions set before us in a systematic way who Christ is and what is the meaning of His work. In brief, the Confessions systematize for us the record of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. We are and must remain a Confessional church. The *love* of the truth, i.e., the *love* of the doctrinal truths set forth in the Confessions over against every distortion of the meaning of God's Word, forms the basis for the unity of believers.

This has several very practical implications for you, the young people of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the first place *you* must read and study those Confessions. We must not neglect the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, who has led our fathers into all the truth. We must build upon their confessions; we must maintain their witness over against every error. You want to *express your love*, i.e., the love of Jesus Christ? Then do not neglect the testimony of *His* Spirit. Secondly, when you are dating and looking for your life's partner, you must search in the right places. I dare say you will not find one who loves the truths of the confessions at the "movies", or at the "race track" or at the "rock festivals." The enemies of God go there. Look for your life's partner in the sphere of the church. Thirdly, when we are tempted to leave our churches and to go elsewhere, we must be very cautious. When troubles, bickering and a spirit of bitterness are found among us we are tempted to say: "Boy, I have had my belly full of it... I am leaving." Or we might want to leave the church because of a certain "sweetheart" who refuses to come to our church. We must ask ourselves, at those times, do these things *warrant* a separation from the church. Only corruptions or denials of the truths of Scripture or the Confessions can possibly warrant or merit a separation from our churches. Many have found *occasions* in our

churches to express *their* “lack of love” for the Confessions of our fathers. History has proven this. Remember, it is only on Scriptural and Confessional grounds that we may even entertain the temptation to leave the church. Conversely, it is only on an understanding and love of the Confessions that we can maintain the unity of believers. There is no love manifest where there is a rejection or denial of the Confessions. There is no expression of the unity of believers *in* Christ where they neglect and disregard the Confessions as irrelevant for our times.

If *you* make the Reformed Confessions your confession and if you live out of a love for those Confessions, then you will not be so easily “rocked” by all manner of superficial accusations, but will begin to experience the unity believers have in Christ Jesus. We are not, and I hope never become, a church of back-slapping, hand-shaking Philanthropist. The “love of man” has become the basis for the unity of believers in nearly every church round about us. That ought to be obvious to all of us. In conclusion, therefore, don’t “sweat” the accusations of the Humanist; but we must be careful that God does not charge us with—*you* have lost your first love.

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