

Table Of Duties: “A Blameless Ministry”

By Theodore Mittelstaedt

It is a great thing to be a minister of Christ; great, but not as the world counts greatness. Not as it is so often wrongly esteemed by those within the church, who look upon the ministers as a sort of superior set: “sitting in Moses’ seat” is the way Jesus in holy irony once expressed the popular opinion of it. And we too who have this ministry, how often we lose sight of what its greatness really is—either we flaunt it, as though it were something of ours; or else we grow faint at it, our eyes dimmed by its apparent failures because so many reject, so many fail to appreciate the Gospel which it brings. And so the Lord must call us back as He did His prophet of old: “Elijah, what doest thou here?” It is a great thing to be a minister of Christ; but great ever only in the Lord’s own sense, according to the faithful saying: “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” I Tim. 3:1.

It is a good work (*καλον ἔργον*); great and good, a noble excellent work in the sight of God and of all true Christians; a good work, *καλον ἔργον*, to which there ought therefore attach nothing of *κακον*, of evil, of baseness. And, may we note it well, it is a work. *Negotium, non otium*, says Bengel. No life of ease, no sinecure; but a work—a work which, as also the Lord would have us recognize, takes in the whole of man and his entire conduct. It calls for all his energy. It takes into account his every waking moment, and his sleeping too. And even his home, his wife and children, are not exempt from its requirements—something we as pastors sometimes forget. But though we sometimes forget it, the world often, and when we least expect it, does not. And certainly God wants us to remember it always.

“Accordingly,” as it is written—and with the little Greek particle *own* God intimately connects His workman with His work—“accordingly,” says God by the pen of His inspired apostle, “A bishop must be blameless.” I Tim. 3:2. And not only in this instance, but repeatedly throughout the pastoral epistles, and in his other letters too, Paul puts it down as a prime requirement of the servant of the Word that he be blameless. In at least three places Paul spells it out explicitly, exactly what that means, to be blameless, to be a *διακονος*, a good minister, to match the *καλον ἔργον*, the good work, which is the ministry. Nor does he put it down as a mere desideratum, something devoutly to be hoped and striven for; no, says God, this is what must be, *δει*: A bishop must be blameless.

The thought here, thank God, is not that we must be sinless, or even faultless; else we must all despair. Nor is it required that no man should ever try to cast blame upon us, or ever say to us as to God’s prophet: “Art thou he that is troubling Israel?” “Woe unto you,” says Jesus, “when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” Luke 6:26. What is meant by blameless, Paul has himself defined as “giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed.” II Cor. 6:3. That the cause of Christ and His Gospel should never suffer even the slightest blemish (*μωρος*) on our account! that none be made to stumble even to his slight spiritual hurt, not even to stub his toe, *προσκοπη*, through any fault of ours! “Giving no offense in anything,” *μδεμια εν μηδενι*, so careful must we be!

How earnestly, therefore, and with what serious introspection we need to study often the many Scripture passages which say, “Take heed!” How much we need to place ourselves humbly under God’s guidance, again and again to go to His Word, that we may lead and shepherd aright the flock entrusted to us—or, as Paul states it, “that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church.” I Tim. 3:15.

It is the latter thought—of going again and again to God’s Word for guidance—and no doubt also this latter passage, which speaks of conduct in the Church as in the house of God, that moved Luther to append to his Small Catechism that section known as the “Table of Duties,” *Die Haustafel*.

A most unfortunate translation, this term “Table of Duties.” It does not begin to express what Luther wanted to express. Luther does not here, nor does the Bible ever, speak of “duties.” Where in our Bible translations the term does occur (Luke 17:10 and Rom. 15:27), the word is rather “obligation,” an indebtedness that is imposed upon us not from without but from within: what must follow from our very nature, being what

we are, what God's grace has made us. And where our Catechism speaks of the Table of Duties as being "certain passages of Scripture for various classes and stations of men, whereby they are to be admonished of their respective offices and duties," Luther says, *dadurch dieselben als durch eigene Lektion ihres Amtes und Dienstes zu ermahnen*.

As Luther conceived his *Haustafel*, and as we are to use it, it is a brief compendium of those Scripture passages to which the Christian can readily go again and again for guidance, each according to his station and service, "as by a special lesson," *durch eigene Lektion*. As one who has been made a blessed member of God's household by faith in Jesus, the Christian will want to hear it again and again, and will not tire to learn it, how he too in his place can serve the Lord with gladness. No matter what his station and service, there is a "special lesson" in God's Word for him.

Let each his lesson learn with care,
And all the household well shall fare.

If now in his *Haustafel*, in his guidelines for proper conduct in God's household, Luther comes to speak of pastors in first place, it is not because they rank first. Before God, in His household, all stations and services are alike holy. And yet by reason of the very nature of their work, pastors must lead as well as feed, not being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. They first of all must learn it, how they ought to conduct themselves in God's household. And as to pastors: their work requires of them that they be blameless. It is the "special lesson" of their station and service. Theirs must be A BLAMELESS MINISTRY.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker (omit "not greedy of filthy lucre" as not found in better texts, imported from Titus 1); but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; ... not a novice; —Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. I Tim. 3:2, 3, 4, 6. Titus 1:9.

It is a long list, wherein are stated item by item the requirements of a blameless ministry. They are all of them taken from I Tim. 3, except the last, which is added by way of amplification from Titus 1. Looked at as we have them in translation, they may appear to be in rather loose array, as though Paul had set them down just as they happened to come to his mind. But that, we know, is hardly Paul's way. And here too, if we look at the original text, it must become apparent even to us who are not linguists that Paul writes as a master craftsman, a literary artist of the first water. Here is a model paragraph, with unity, coherence, emphasis—marked also by a beauty of style that is anything but haphazard. First, as always in a good paragraph, there is the topic sentence, which governs all the rest. "A bishop must be blameless." The word is ἀνεπιλημπτον. We note how even in form the explanatory words are tied to it, not in a wooden way, but interestingly, by alliteration, we'd say: only in Greek it's at the end: μιας γυναικος ανδρα, νηφαλιον, σωφρονα, κοσμιον, φιλοξενον, διδακτικον, μη παροινον, μη πληκτην, αλλα επιεικη, αμαχον, αφιλαργυρον; then again προισταμενον; and finally μη νεοφυτον.

These then, Paul submits, are the essential requirements of a blameless ministry. The outline of his thoughts is this: A pastor must be blameless 1) as to his own person and character, 2) as to his home and family life, and 3) as to his care of the Church.

A Pastor Must Be Blameless as to His Person and Character

We find ten requirements listed under this thought. They may be grouped as 1 + 3 + 2 + 4 = 10. The first four (1 + 3) may well be called personal requirements. Heading the list is this, a pastor must be

The Husband Of One Wife. It is not necessary to give much attention to the fancied interpretations given these words through the long history of the Christian Church. Plainly Paul does not say that every

minister must be married; else he himself could not have served. More widespread has been the notion that Paul forbids to widowed pastors a second marriage. Even the RSV, as also Moffatt, translates so, interpretatively: “married only once.” But the Bible knows no double standard of morality, one for pastors, another for people. The remarriage which God’s Word sanctions for widowers in general (Rom. 7:1–3 and I Cor. 7:8ff.) may not be denied to widowed ministers. What the apostle does require as to the pastor’s person is that he be morally blameless; if married, a “one woman sort of a husband,” *μιας γυναικος άνδρα*.

It may well have been the moral laxity of his time that moved Paul to put personal purity at the head of the list, making it the No. 1 requirement of a blameless ministry. We know from the many warnings in Paul’s epistles how bad those times were, bad enough to make even a pagan cry out, *O tempora! O mores!* But there is nothing temporal about immorality and the sins against the Sixth Commandment. And pastors of all ages have been Satan’s No. 1 targets in this respect. Even a little carelessness on the part of the pastor in his dealings with the opposite sex can by wagging, gossiping tongues be fanned into a great fire. And nothing can better be used by Satan and the world to hinder the cause of Christ and His Gospel. Our teachers of pastoral theology all urge extreme care upon the minister in his relation to women. Some pastoral advisors even counsel against pastoral visits to the house where the husband is not at home. Very few pastors, I am sure, would agree with that. But God knows, and every pastor knows, how necessary it is to guard heart and conduct. What pastor who has not in his ministry experienced the beauty and blessedness of the word: “Entreat the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity.” I Tim. 5:2. God expects His Church’s pastors to be No. 1 examples in moral cleanness, in unassailable purity.

The following three personal qualifications (+3) for a blameless ministry may well be taken together. They are akin in meaning. They are, taken together, the marks and makings of the Christian gentleman: “vigilant,” “sober,” “of good behaviour.”

Vigilant may perhaps best be defined as temperate in judgment, not carried away to extremes, watchful in all things. It opens up the whole field of the pastor’s everyday bearing and conduct: serious but not somber, friendly but not familiar, common but not coarse, vivacious perhaps but never vulgar, and so on ad infinitum.

Spiritually too a pastor must be temperate, especially in his judgment of men. Dealing with people of all temperaments, he must beware the dangerous business of judging hearts, that thing called *Herzensrichterei*. The Apostle Paul may not have had just this in mind, but his words are apropos when he writes, I Tim. 5:24–25: “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment, and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.” Not all in the church are repentant Peters or devoted Marys. There may be those whose sorrow for sin or whose appreciation of the Gospel of their forgiveness is just as great, but who cannot show it, at least not in the same way. The \$5 offering of the close-fisted Christian may represent a greater triumph of grace than the \$25 of his spendthrift brother. Or he may be doing good in a hundred other ways not known to men, known only to Jesus, which only Judgment Day will reveal. A pastor must be temperate in judgment. And then there are the trends and tendencies of the times, the fads and fancies that sweep also through the church, and that would sweep the pastor off his bearings: there are the flatteries of some, the threats of others, that would cause him to modify his message; the temptations of too great or too little success. Watch thou in all things, says Paul; be “vigilant.”

Sober means sound in judgment. It is a favorite word of Paul. He speaks of thinking soberly, that none should think of himself more highly than he ought to think. He speaks of living soberly in this present world, avoiding what is ungodly and worldly, living as in the light of the day of Jesus Christ.

Sober-mindedness is a wonderful gift of God, the precious fruit of a faith that has learned to rest alone on God’s saving grace. It is the soundness of mind that comes when the mind is permeated by the sound doctrine of God’s Word and is able to evaluate properly all matters affecting Christian life and faith. Paul enjoins sober-mindedness upon all Christians, men and women, old and young. But like the other requirements of a blameless ministry, it must be found in special measure in him who is called to lead in the Church and be an example to the flock. So many things come up in congregational life, from teacher training to turkey dinners. Problems arise, and at once from every side solutions are offered—some tempting enough on the surface and seemingly harmless, but which in the end may prove harmful to the spiritual life of the Church. A pastor must

know what is safe, what is in keeping with the Church's message of salvation by grace, what will stand in the light of the day of Jesus Christ. He must be sound in judgment, "sober."

Of Good Behaviour is the fourth of the personal qualities essential to a blameless ministry. The Greek word is κοσμιον, meaning "orderly," "decorous." It certainly refers to a pastor's behavior. It includes such matters as his appearance, his personal habits, his manner of speech, his mode of dress. Good manners never hurt anyone, least of all a pastor. There is no excuse for boorishness, ever. As a Christian, if not as a man of good breeding and education, a pastor will observe proper decorum.

But the word *kosmios* goes beyond that. It refers rather to an inward quality of heart and mind, a sense of propriety, perhaps best expressed by the word "tactful." Christian tact, of course, is meant; that which has its roots in true Christian love and consideration. Tact has been defined as "not so much what you say, as how you say it; not what you do, but how you do it." Many a pastor of fine gifts has spoiled it for himself and ruined his usefulness to the Church because he lacked tact. A pastor must be tactful, especially in dealing with difficult situations, when offering correction and rebuke? When Paul says, I Tim. 5:1: "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren," he does not mean a pastor is not to rebuke those in the wrong—that would be to countermand his own order to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine," II Tim. 4:2—but the point of the message and of the word here used for "rebuke" is how it is to be done: not in high-handed fashion, striking down from above, μη επιπληξης, but with all consideration as one would admonish his own father or brother. Speaking truth in love; evangelically, by the mercies of God. Paul is our pattern in dealing with the difficult. He addresses them lovingly as Christians and children of God. He first seeks to build up their faith. He lays a basis for his admonition in the mercies of God that they have known and experienced. He appeals to their Christian knowledge, sometimes even excusing himself that he should at all have to admonish them since they themselves know what is right and good. He is not ashamed to wear his heart on his sleeve, showing affection and anguish of heart for them by his tears. He places himself at their side; "let us," he says. He holds out to them the reward of grace. Yet withal he never minimizes their sins. He speaks the truth bluntly, though it hurts—but never just to hurt but that the Gospel might heal. If they persist in their sin, it must be in the face of God's great love and of his own, which is willing itself to be cut off rather than to see them cut off from the grace of God. Oh, for the love and the tact of a Paul! Oh, to be so "of good behaviour!"

There follows now after the four personal qualifications a series of six that, if only for the sake of making a division, we might call traits of character. The distinction is slight; if there is a difference, it is between qualities that relate more to a pastor's inner make-up and those that relate more to his dealings with others. At least so we would read them. First two positive characteristics (+2), then four negative (+4).

Given to Hospitality, φιλοξενος, a friend to strangers. In the days of the early Church there was a great deal of travel among Christians, some voluntary, much that was forced because of persecutions. And while there were inns in those days, the travel accommodations were as nothing compared to what they are today. Besides, many Christians were poor. Many were fugitives, whose only haven was the home of Christians. And so the disciples of those days had ample opportunity to exercise the grace of Christian hospitality. If this was expected of all Christians, as we see from the letters of the apostles, how much more of the Christian pastor. It must be an outstanding mark of his character, that he be "given to hospitality."

Times have changed. The opportunities to be φιλοξενος, a friend to strangers, are few and far between. But the essential trait of character, the friendliness, must still stand out in the Christian pastor. If now not φιλοξενος, he can show himself to be φιλαδελφος, a friend to the brethren. A pastor has been called "friend at large"—and he is to be that, not in a hail-fellow, glad-handing sort of way. There is danger in the easy familiarity that calls by first name even the greybeards and stately matrons of the congregation, who may for a season enjoy the thrill and novelty of it; but the old saw is still true about familiarity breeding contempt.

A pastor must be friendly. How many a pastor, sound of doctrine and otherwise gifted, whose ministry has suffered because he was not friendly! And many a man of lesser gifts, whose ministry has been singularly blessed with the God-given gift of friendliness. Not all in the Church have like spiritual gifts, as Paul reminds, I Cor. 12, 13, 14. But there is one gift that all must have, and that must control all other gifts, and that is Christian love, which is also what true Christian friendliness is. It has been said that the self-sacrificing pastor, though a

poor preacher by conventional standards, will find that his people listen to him gladly and to their eternal spiritual benefit, because of what he means to them as friend and shepherd. Paul states it better when he says, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” I Cor. 13:1.

And then there is the friendliness that a pastor owes to brethren in the ministry, the love which is the fulfilling of the law, and especially also of the Eighth Commandment. Who will say the word in this case which to our shame ought to be said? There is also the friendliness to the people of the community outside the Church, who often find reason to fault us for our principles, but let it not be because we are not friendly. When John writes of the false prophet, “Neither bid him God speed,” (II John 10) he writes of religious fellowship and not of the common civilities. A pastor must be friendly, φιλοξενος, φιλαδελφος, a true φιλανθρωπος.

And now, no less essential, rather (using the word “rather” in the sense of Paul, I Cor. 14:1) to come to what is most important of all, a pastor must be διδακτικος.

Apt to Teach. It no doubt takes into account a man’s ability to impart knowledge and to apply it to the hearts of his hearers. What good if a man possess knowledge, yet lack the aptitude to share it with others? Are all teachers? Paul asks. The answer is evident. Not all have been given this gift. The pastor to a marked degree must be “apt to teach.” Yet he will be so only if he has himself been taught of God. And that is the real meaning that lies in διδακτικος. If mere aptitude to teach were meant, the word more likely would be διδασκαλικος. When Paul asked Timothy to choose faithful men “who shall be able to teach others also,” he used the word ικανοι διδασχαι. For the servant of the Word “apt to teach” means that he has first himself been taught of God.

A pastor must be διδακτικος in the sense of God’s prophet of old: “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” Isaiah 50:4. There is a fine hint here for the pastor, that he be found “morning by morning” in the attentive hearing and learning at the Word of the Lord. Many are the demands made upon the modern minister, but let none ever interfere with God’s own demand, that he be διδακτικος, that he may “know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” And what greater blame than if we should fail here! if we should fail the hearts that are hungering for the consolation of God’s Word because we have not given ourselves sufficiently to the study of it! It is God’s own suggestion, given us by the example of the apostles, that we turn administrative matters and certainly also social functions over to others, that we may “give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Served by the Word, we will be able to serve others with it. Nesper in his “Biblical Texts” has stated it well: “When the servant of God himself has drawn nigh to God, God will bless his efforts to draw also others unto Him” p. 78.

Having placed the emphasis where it belongs, upon διδακτικος, Paul hastens to add four negative requirements(+4): μη παροινον, μη πληκτην, αμαχον, αφιλαργυρον. These too must characterize the minister, lest the ministry be blamed.

Not Given to Wine. Not that a pastor must be a teetotaler. He too may enjoy as a gift of God the wine that maketh glad the heart of man. But something else is its abuse. If the pastor would instruct others in the proper use of God’s gifts, how can he do so if he himself misuses them?

The word suggests the whole vast subject of Christian liberty, with the fine regard for others, especially for the weak, which ought to be the hallmark of the Christian pastor, marking him as a true shepherd. Paul summed it up for all time when he said of himself, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.” There are times when a man must needs assert his liberty, the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free; but there are more times perhaps when it is the better part of valor to forego. It was the same Apostle Paul who yielded to the demands of Judaizers no, not for an hour, who says, “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” I Cor. 8:13. Μη παροινος, that the ministry be not blamed.

No Striker. The word is μη πληκτης, not one who lashes out with fist or tongue. To make clear what is meant, the apostle adds, **But Patient**, αλλα επιεικης, perhaps best read as “gentle.” It is a word used by the Greek authors, and also by Luke in Acts 24:4, to express the clemency which is the opposite of a harsh insistence on the letter of the law. The letter killeth, as Paul says. The law cannot give life; it always has the

effect of destroying life. It can work no good thing. Sometimes it may appear to produce results in the Church. There are those who seemingly respond only to law. Come at them with a club and “quota,” cite to them the constitution or a synodical resolution, give them a good tongue lashing, and they perhaps will fall into line. But unless they have been won by the Gospel, and there is true conviction of heart, they have only been made two-fold the sons of perdition. The work of the Church is done not by the killing power of the law, but by the lifegiving power of the Gospel. “I beseech you by the mercy and gentleness of Christ,” says Paul, II Cor. 10:1, using the very word found here. To the Philippians Paul writes, having reminded them of their joy in the Lord, “Let your moderation (your “gentleness,” same word) be known unto all men.” Phil. 4:5. Your gentleness may not always be appreciated; some may call it weakness, especially those who have found it so easy to achieve conformity by law—they get “results,” why can’t you—but remember, Paul was not ashamed to be accounted weak for Christ’s sake, if only he might gain some. To his congregation he could say, “We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.” I Thess. 2:7.

“No striker, but patient.”

Not a Brawler. The meaning of this word Paul elucidates, II Tim. 2:24, where he says, “The servant of the Lord must not strive (must not be a constant battler) but be gentle unto all men (kind to all), apt to teach, patient (enduring evil), in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.” There is divine wisdom here—if only we would always heed it! —in dealing with those who sooner or later in every congregation at one time or another “oppose themselves,” for some reason or another, or for no reason at all, human nature being what it is. But no matter what the provocation, if the ministry is not to receive a blot, a pastor must be one who never fights, ἀμαχος. He is the servant of that Lord of whom it is written: “My servant shall not strive, He shall not cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth” (or as Matthews has it, “unto victory”). As the Master, so must the servant be: he must be ἀμαχος. Fighting never won a single soul. No man was ever argued into being a better church member. You can never win by shouting a man down. The Bible says, “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.” Prov. 15:1. There is only one way of winning a man away from his hostility, and that is Jesus’ way, the way of meekness and love, “kind to all,” “enduring evil,” “in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” Many will not appreciate this meekness—But oh, the victories it has won! And forever it is true, and for the meek pastor too, that the meek shall inherit the earth. “Not a brawler.”

Not Covetous. The word is ἀφιλαργυρος, “no lover of money.” Does Paul add this finally as a sort of after-thought, when putting down the requirements of a blameless ministry? Rather, he states it where its very position must lend it emphasis, as though to say: And now, last but not least, a pastor as to his person and character must be ἀφιλαργυρος, no lover of money. The love of money, says the Bible, using the same word, φιλαργυρια, is the root of all evil; nothing good ever comes of it. And it is so terribly dangerous. It’s like a snare out of hell that, once it has wrapped its coils about a man, draws him down, down ever deeper, as it has oh, so many! even to destruction and perdition. But thou, O man of God, flee these things!

In a day when money has become the measure of all things, and the love of it ensnares so many, how can a pastor warn of these dangers when he himself is entangled in them? How shall he train in godly contentment, who does himself not give evidence of this grace? Even what might appear to be love of money, or misconstrued as such, must be avoided by a pastor.

How careful the Apostle Paul was in his ministry! He states it as the full right of every pastor to live of the Gospel. But he himself did not use the right, as he says, “for the Gospel’s sake.” Better to be poor, than to have Christ’s cause suffer because, say, of the envy of men. As the apostle reminds in that same connection, there is a higher glory and a deeper satisfaction in serving Christ than any earthly emoluments can afford. It was Paul’s glory, and it ought to be the glory of every pastor, to be counted among those who are poor, yet make many rich; who have nothing, and yet possess all things.

“Not greedy of filthy lucre.” Not long ago a well-known physician charged the men of his profession with being more concerned about how big a car they drive, how elaborate their home, how large their income, than about their work in the unselfish service of others. For the Christian pastor, for whom Christ’s people often

do so much if only to show their love and loyalty to Jesus—for him the danger is ever present that he forget that he has been called not to be ministered unto but to minister, that he get to think the congregation is there for him, and not he for the congregation. “Ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” is the glory and true greatness of the Christian ministry. “Whosoever will be great among you,” says Jesus, “let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” Matt. 20:26, 27.

How great are the requirements of a blameless ministry as to a pastor’s own person and character! How great a thing it is, to be a minister of Christ! Ten personal requirements have been listed by Paul. Ten is the number of perfection. But in the light of them, how imperfect we must confess ourselves to be. God forgive us our many shortcomings! God have mercy on us all!

A Pastor must be Blameless as to His Home and Family Life

Next to the pastor’s own person and character, there is nothing that needs closer watching—or that is more closely watched by others—than the pastor’s home and family life. That too is an essential part of his ministry. There is no conflict of interests between the family and the congregation of a pastor, as though the best interests of the one must needs be sacrificed upon the altar of the other; there are no separate areas of obligation. On the contrary, God has intimately connected the two and placed them in a definite relationship: the better the husband and father, the better the pastor. A pastor must be:

One that Ruleth Well His Own House, Having His Children in Subjection With All Gravity. It is not good that the man should be alone. And for the pastor this means that for his fullest usefulness to the Church, he ought to be a family man. In His inscrutable wisdom God has His exceptions here too, if only to prove the wisdom of the rule. And here too, as it is written, wisdom is justified of her children. God can use both as they are needed, the married and the unmarried, the childless and the children-blessed. But oh, the blessedness of him who can by his own example as well as by his words extol the sanctity of marriage and the all-surpassing happiness of the Christian home, who out of his own experience can counsel his people in these important matters.

The parsonage, with all that the name implies, is the peculiar heritage of our Lutheran church. Ever since that June 13th day of 1525, when Luther took to wife Catherine von Borah, its history has been illustrious—not by the large number of its sons and daughters who have made the pages of Who’s Who, but in the shining example it has been of how God’s Word can bless a home, in its quiet influence for good in Church and community, and in the blessing it has been to pastor and congregation. How many a pastor has been blessed beyond all saying by her who is the parsonage’s queen, who has sometimes been called the “shepherdess”—which title she herself would be the first rightfully to disclaim—whose highest honor it is to be known simply as the pastor’s wife. Not unknown, alas! is the wife who has presumed to run the home and not infrequently then also the congregation, bringing shame upon the pastor and blame upon his ministry. But blessed, and thrice blessed, she who quietly and unassumingly stands out in the church as wife and mother, who in the true fear of God makes it easy for her husband to be what God intended him to be, the family head who rules well the home, and who with him gladly shares the joys and sorrows and, not unknown, the privations of the parsonage. She not shine in the world, or ever be widely acclaimed in may the church; but she is known to God, and one day she too will shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars forever and ever.

Of the pastor God certainly expects and requires that he be an exemplary husband and father. He must rule well his household. He must command the obedience and respect of his children. Not as a harsh commandant; that’s not what Paul means when he says, “with all gravity.” The word is “with dignity.” And it doesn’t refer to the conduct of the pastor’s children. The requirement is of the pastor, that he train up his children worthily, in a manner worthy also of their love and respect. There is particular danger for a pastor, wanting his children to be models in all respects and seeing the laxity of so many homes, to go to the opposite extreme: to be too strict with his children, to expect too much of them. The Bible warns us against provoking our children to wrath. God expects of a pastor, that he have his children in subjection; and while that requires a firm hand, it also requires a loving and understanding heart if it is to be “with all dignity.” There must be

discipline—and not a little of it because a pastor’s children, no less than others, have an Old Adam which must be curbed and sometimes forcibly be put down. There must be admonition—and no end of it because devil and world take special delight in misleading a pastor’s children in order to discredit the ministry. God has made it clear that He wants in His service no Eli, of whom it is written, I Sam. 3:13, that he did not even admonish his wicked sons. There must be admonition and discipline, but let it be the discipline and admonition of the Lord, such as is joined to the Lord and His Word. A pastor must stand out in the church as one who stands at the head of his family with all dignity.

This matter of a pastor’s ruling well his household is important. It’s not only that ill-trained children are a bad example to the church. There is an even graver side to the matter. Paul adds it in a parenthetical remark which is not found in our Catechism. He says, “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?” I Tim. 3:5. If a man fail to train up his own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, how can he handle the greater responsibility of nourishing properly a whole congregation? If he cannot rule well even his own little family, how shall he take care of the Church of God?

And that brings Paul directly to the thought that a pastor must be blameless not only in his home and family life, but also in his care of the Church.

A Pastor Must Be Blameless as to His Care of the Church

Not a Novice. A novice is “one newly planted” in the sense of one newly come to faith. In the early days of the apostles, when the Church was first being planted, it was at first necessary to use novices as elders because no others were available. When Paul was completing his first missionary journey, we read, Acts 14:23, how on his way back he had the congregations elect to themselves elders in every church. But now, some ten or twelve years later, Paul would have only such elected to the office of bishop, as are veterans in the faith. A man who for ten or twelve years has been under the influence of God’s Word, and whose faith has been proved on the battle ground of daily living, will be better qualified to lead in the Church than any novice, no matter how superior his gifts.

Today, when only such are called into the ministry as have been properly trained and have given indication of their spiritual maturity, it yet stands that there is an advantage in age and experience. It ought not be, as is sometimes said, that after a pastor has reached a certain age, his prospects for receiving a call are remote. Let no pastor grow old before his years by letting himself get into a rut, by growing stale and stagnant especially in his mental and spiritual growth—when Paul was old and at the end of his career, he yet called for his books and parchments! Let no one despise the enthusiasm and vibrant energy of the youthful pastor who would set the world on fire for Christ! Yet it is true that there is a mellowness of judgment that comes only with years, and a wisdom that comes only by experience.

Paul says, “Not a novice.” He has in mind a special danger for the pastor, and especially for the inexperienced pastor. It is not included in our Catechism, but in I Tim. 3:6 it reads: “lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” The danger of pride is ever present for every pastor, but especially for the inexperienced pastor who has not gone far in the school of affliction by which God keeps humble His servants. Pride ever cometh before the fall. Pride, as the apostle says, is the way of the devil—it’s the way the devil fell—and it is the devil’s own way of bringing others into like condemnation. Luther wasn’t just being facetious when he told the person who was praising him inordinately for the wonderful sermon he had preached, that that was exactly what the devil had whispered in his ear as he came down from the pulpit. Like Peter taking his Lord aside, so a pastor’s best friends and admirers may easily become his worst enemies when they unwittingly nurture his pride; and it’s not so easy then to say, or at least to remember to think, Get thee behind me, Satan.

“Not a novice,” read in the light of its context, is a word for even the hoariest veteran of the Cross; it speaks to all and says, Be humble! For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. A pastor must be humble. Not with a feigned humility. Not with the pride of humility that seems to say, See how humble I am. The humility that must mark a pastor’s care of the Church is that which humbly bows to the Word. It is

described in the Bible as “trembling at the Word,” or “holding fast (clinging to) the Word.” It is to know that everything that is worthwhile in the Church is accomplished not by the pastor’s personality or by his gifts, but by the Word as it is faithfully proclaimed, faithfully applied, and faithfully followed. It was this that Luther learned to know, not in a formal way but by his own experience. He wanted every pastor to know it, and ever to remember it. For that reason he added to the Table of Duties under the requirements of a blameless ministry also that other word from Titus 1, where Paul likewise writes, “A bishop must be blameless...” and then adds:

Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayer.

Two things are here predicated of the Word: 1. that it is absolutely faithful, reliable, trustworthy in what it teaches, in its διδάχαι; and 2. that it alone can save, comfort, and convict as it is faithfully taught, the διδασκαλία of it. A pastor in his care of the Church must show that what is here predicated of the Word is also the two-fold conviction of his heart.

1. For a pastor to doubt the validity of the Word, or to set forth in half-hearted or doubtful manner anything that it teaches, is to bring serious blame upon his ministry and to make him unworthy of the care of souls. There must be the conviction of a Peter: We have a more sure Word of prophesy ... Lord, at Thy Word!

2. For a pastor to depart in any way in his teaching from the teaching of the Word, is to make unsound his ministry; for him to resort to any other means to save, comfort, or convict, is to put in jeopardy the Church and to make him unworthy of its care. And especially when it comes to admonishing, to exhortation to Christian living, it is so easy for a preacher to become a moralist, preaching mere morals, appealing to pride, giving the people a task instead of a heavenly gift, forgetting what has been well said: that you cannot better preach righteousness of life than by preaching the righteousness of Christ.

A pastor in his care of the Church is likened in God’s Word to a builder who builds upon the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. It may be gold, silver, precious stones that he builds—if his teaching be in accord with the faithful Word; or it may be wood, hay, stubble—all the sham life that is built by the cheap moralism of men. Judgment day shall reveal their true character. How terrible on that day for a pastor, himself saved as by fire—like a man fleeing naked from a burning house—to see his work of a lifetime gone, burned up, because it was worthless. The warning is there, so that all who run may read. Paul states it: “Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” I Cor. 3:10.

And finally there is also the matter of the pastor’s own spiritual life. That too is a part of his care of the Church, and an important part. It is written: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.” I Tim. 4:16. What the pastor so boldly proclaims to others in Jesus’ name, must be what he himself as a poor suppliant clings to, reaching out for it with trembling and empty hand: Wretched man that I am! God be merciful to me a sinner! As a poor wretched sinner who daily stands in need of God’s pardoning grace, it must be the cry of his heart as it was of Peter and the apostles: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And that, finally, is what Paul means when he says a pastor must be holding fast, clinging to, the faithful Word, that he may be able to exhort and convince.

“Holding fast the faithful Word,” a pastor will be able to exhort, that is, to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God.

“Holding fast the faithful Word,” a pastor will be able to convict the gainsayers. Not that they will always, or perhaps even often, be won by the Word; but that they stand convicted before the Church, that the believers may be warned of their errors.

“Holding fast the faithful Word.” It all sounds so simple. It is so easy to speak of what it all means. But what pastor who has not experienced how hard it is to live up to its requirements! How many the temptations to professionalize the ministry! How real the danger of spiritual satiety, or of carnal security! Or the danger of formalism, that we let slip through our fingers the life-giving Word even while retaining its outward form. And even the Apostle Paul never let himself forget the danger of it for him. While he could say in the full assurance of faith, “I know whom I have believed ...” he yet knew that he had need daily to watch and fight and study and pray, lest by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. It was his constant

concern that he might apprehend that for which also he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. He would be mindful of how great a thing it is, to be a minister of Christ—how great its responsibilities, if his ministry was to be blameless.

And what shall we say when we compare ourselves and our ministry with what God requires of us? Who of us is not made heavy of heart, no matter where we take up the comparison, realizing our shortcomings, our failings, our sins—and how often by only a word, wrongly spoken or spoken at the wrong time or not spoken when it should have been spoken? And with every new day God grants us, as we grow older in His service, we feel it the more by how much we fail. And even as we flee daily to Christ and His Cross and are there assured of our forgiveness, we know that we are no more worthy to be called His servants. And our hearts cry out within us, even as Peter of old, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! By which like Peter we mean to say, O Lord, we are not worthy to be near Thee, but oh, let us stay! To us then, even as to Peter and the apostles, the Savior gives answer, “Fear not, I will make you fishers of men ... You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you ... Go, work today, while yet it is day...

And lo, I am with you ...

... oh, be not dismayed,

For I am your God and will still give you aid.

I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,

Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.”

Therefore, as it is written, seeing we have this ministry, we faint not. Poor, weak vessels of clay, we know that the treasure of the Gospel has been committed to us, not that we should have to lend it power, but that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Our sufficiency, if we would call it that, is all of God and comes to us by the very Word to whose ministry He has called us.

And so we would go again and again to that Word for inspiration and guidance. And so we would use also the Table of Duties, even as Luther intended it, that we might readily learn how we ought to conduct ourselves in God's household, how we in our place can serve the Lord with gladness. We know we cannot learn too well what is the “special lesson” for our service and station: that we be blameless in our person, in our home life, and in our care of the Church. We know we shall never be able to appreciate enough how great a thing it is to be a minister of Christ.