

***MINISTER/MASTER***  
NOT

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You know how unworthy I am to fill so great and important an office. Were it not for your counsel, I would have failed long ago. Therefore I call upon you for guidance. Gladly will I give my heart and voice to this work. I want to teach the people. I want always to seek and study in your word, and eagerly to meditate upon it. Use me as your instrument. Lord, do not forsake me. If I were alone, I would ruin everything. Amen. <sup>1</sup>

With this prayer, Dr. Martin Luther came before God and confessed his fears and misgivings, expressed his hopes and desires, and gave an evaluation of his own abilities as a pastor faced with the task of serving his flock. Yes, Luther recognized that the ministry was not a special order or class of men, but at the same time he did regard it as an office of great importance. Just as the apostle Paul spoke of a "*noble task*" (I Timothy 3:1), Luther once stated, "On the man who is ordained to the ministry the highest office in Christendom is conferred." <sup>2</sup>

In Luther's prayer, we hear the "heart of a pastor" clearly expressing itself. Can the same be said of what people see and hear from us? Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ....*" (I Corinthians 4:1). Is that the case in regard to us? Are we willing to be a servant instead of a lord, a minister instead of a master? Do our lives demonstrate to others that we have heeded those familiar inspired words, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 2:5)? But at the same time, do we always recognize that ours is truly a "high calling" in the proper sense? We know there are times when we would have to answer, "No," to each of those questions. And, as often as not, these are the times when the devil uses our Old Adam and the voice of the world to create feelings of frustration, disillusionment, worry, and even failure. It's no accident, as far as the devil is concerned, that these feelings have to affect our ministry and, of course, the march of the gospel message to "*all nations.*" The devil knows that the willingness to serve, the willingness to give every ounce of our energy to this mission is an indispensable quality for the ministry. If he can convince us that we have failed, or if he can lead us to be dissatisfied, in this position of servant, he feels successful.

Paul Lindemann made the statement: "The spirit of service and the habit of ministry is of course not exclusively a characteristic of the ordained ambassador. It is caught and held by many great-souled men in all legitimate walks of life. But in the minds and in the speech of man our office is primarily the office of 'the ministry'." <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, the assignment, writing and presentation of this paper is intended neither to eliminate the laity from the universal priesthood, nor to imply that God established only one form of ministry, nor to imply that none of the thoughts in this paper would ever apply to anyone else; rather, the intention is simply to focus

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<sup>1</sup>George R. Kraus, "*Luther, The Shepherd of Souls.*" 1986 Reformation Lectures, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, p. 9-1

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.39-II

<sup>3</sup>Paul Lindemann, *Ambassadors of Christ*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935, p. 33

on the publicly called "ministers," in this case, pastors, as they "minister."

As we consider the public ministry of the church and come to grips seriously with the Scriptural concept of ministry, the bottom line of that word is "servant." There are essentially three key words in the New Testament to describe the person involved in ministry: *diakonos* (views a servant in relation to his work); *huperetes* (looks at the servant in relation to his master); and *leitourgos* (sees the servant as a public servant).<sup>4</sup> With each of these words, however, the distinctive nature of ministry is the status of servant under the Lord Jesus Christ. This may not totally mesh with the fact that ministers are often looked to, and spoken of, as spiritual leaders. Even the people of the world look at a minister as a type of leader. To the world, it is a case of either/or; Christ wants us to see it as a case of both/and - both servant and leader, but without acting as, or giving the impression of being, a master. This is not as easy as it sounds. Each of us would have to agree, I am sure, that this can lead to confusion and a certain amount of tension. But really, it all goes back to Paul's words, doesn't it? *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."* What is the minister's attitude?

### I. The Minister's Attitude Toward Christ

As the minister looks to Christ, he sees and hears what ministry means - he sees and hears the attitude of Christ. Christ's words and actions, however, not only provide us with an example; as the center of the gospel message, they provide us with the means to follow that example. The apostle Paul so beautifully described Christ's attitude: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich"* (II Corinthians 8:9). Peter admonished his readers, *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps"* (I Peter 2:21). John also wrote: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers"* (I John 3:16). These last two passages, from the very men who had indicated a personal desire for greatness, present a wonderful summary of what they saw in Christ and learned from Him. Through the Holy Spirit, they learned that in such service as they saw in Christ there is a unique true leadership and true greatness. They understood what Jesus meant when He said: *"...you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant; and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:25-27).

Think about that. When the Son of God became a man, He came as a servant. He was *"in very nature God,"* yet He did not come with all kinds of pomp and glory requiring everyone to serve Him. Instead, He was serving them and meeting their needs. He led a servant's life, virtually empty of the blessings people say Christians should enjoy. He was pretty much separated from His family. He was unmarried and had no family of His own. He had no wealth or property, no status, no home. He died a lowly criminal's death. Here is our model for service; here is our reason for service.

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<sup>4</sup>William H. Ameiss, *"Ministry as Servanthood - A Word Study"* (Appendix), p. 58

In a very special sense He has become our example. More than all other people, it is necessary for us to think His thoughts, to shape our ideals in harmony with the standard that He has left us. It is true, of course, that we cannot in exactly the same sense that Christ did give our lives as ransoms for many. Yet we can be true ministers only when His spirit of self-sacrifice lies as the foundation of our ministry. Perhaps we would do well to periodically examine ourselves in this respect. Are we serving ourselves or Christ? Without realizing it, have we slipped into more of a concern about personal success and finding some identity in that success than serving Christ? Have we become preoccupied with numbers and growth as opposed to serving Christ? Does our ministry have the purpose of bringing glory to Christ? Are we using Christ for our model in ministry, but is our motivation a problem?

It is of vital importance not only for our ministry, but for the welfare of our own souls, that we not lose sight of Christ. It is so easy, while bringing others to the foot of the cross, to neglect coming there ourselves. A book entitled The Preacher: His Life and Work contains the following statement:

The great peril of the minister, because its teaching is so fatal, is that of deadening familiarity with the sublime. You will not have been long in the ministry before you discover that it is possible to be fussily busy about the Holy Place and yet not be religious. We may become mere guide-posts, when we were intended to be guides. We may indicate the way and yet not be found in it. We may be professors, but not pilgrims. Our studies may be workshops instead of 'upper rooms.' Our share in the table provisions may be that of analysts rather than guests. We may become so absorbed in words that we forget to heed the Word. And the consummation of the subtle peril may be this: we may come to assume that fine talk is fine living, that expository skill is deep piety, and while we are fondly hugging the non-essentials, the veritable essence escapes.<sup>5</sup>

(1935!)

Our own personal spiritual condition is of supreme importance in the carrying out of our ministry. We must never forget that we are first of all Christian men and then, by the grace of God, ministers who are called to serve. Our attitude toward Christ will say much about our service to our fellowmen as we lead them to their Savior, nourish them in the understanding of His Word and in the application of that Word to their daily lives.

## II. The Minister's Attitude Toward the People He Serves

Consider the people who make up your congregation (s). As you picture them sitting in the pew, walking through the classroom door, lying in a hospital bed, confined to their homes or special care facilities, opening or not opening the door to their home for your pastoral visit, not returning your telephone calls, etc., is your attitude one of genuine love and concern for their souls, tempered with occasional disappointment? Or has your attitude become one of impatience and

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<sup>5</sup>Lindemann, op. cit., pp. 31-32

have you developed a strain of frustration that at times borders on resentment?

Again, we cannot separate ourselves from the "attitude of Christ." More than once, Jesus had to deal with His erring, ignorant, overly ambitious disciples. One commentator made the following observation:

The amazing thing about Jesus is that He never lost patience and became irritated .... Christ does not explode at their obtuseness or blaze at their blindness, or despair at their unteachableness. In gentleness, in sympathy, and in love, with never an impatient word, He seeks to lead them to the truth. <sup>6</sup>

We need to perceive God's people as Christ would look at them. We need to perceive God's people as JUSTIFIED people, reconciled people, people accepted by God for the sake of Christ. A second point, closely tied in with this, is the importance of perceiving the Christian as "simul justus et peccator," at-the-same-time-saint-and-sinner. There is no basis for looking at our fellow-believers and congregational members as sinless saints. Was it not one of Luther's great discoveries that God's people continue as sinners even while they are declared saints by Christ? How much anguish has been caused in the world and in many congregations by Christian idealists or pietists trying to force God's people to become perfectionists and "super-saints"! If the minister of Christ would learn from Scripture to look at people through the eyes of Christ and see the "simul justus et peccator," this would greatly affect his goals, his satisfaction and his effectiveness in ministry.

A spirit of faithful, devoted service on our part is naturally going to be based on a condition of humble personal faith. There simply can be no spirit of self-sacrifice when we still exalt self. And any exalting of oneself is out of the question when we realize and accept that we, too, are one of those "sinner-saints." The Holy Spirit had led Paul to also recognize this, and there is no more appropriate model for a minister of Christ than that presented by Paul when he confesses: *"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us"* (I Thessalonians 2:8). These were not the words of a master, and neither were these: *"So will I very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?"* (II Corinthians 12:15).

Yes, there may be times when our increasing love for the people we serve may not seem to result in a corresponding increase in their response of love. We, however, have not been sent to receive sacrifices from our people, but to make ourselves sacrifices on their behalf, even though sometimes our devotion to them may be repaid with seeming ingratitude. Could this occasionally create an unbecoming hunger for signs of appreciation? How inappropriate for a minister of Christ to be observed priming his ears to catch every possible compliment, arranging situations and leading conversations with the clear intent of drawing out words of praise. Paul Lindemann, once again, makes the following observation:

The man who is always hungry for this affection and honor and

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<sup>6</sup>Ndubuisi B. Akuchie, "The Servants and the Superstars: An Examination of Servant Leadership in Light of Matthew 20:20-28," Christian Education Journal, Vol. XIV, Number 1, p. 44

LPH, 1935  
Ambassador  
for Christ

insists on being accorded them never gets them, while he who seeks to be servant of all, comforting the sorrowing, assisting the weak, sustaining the cross-bearers, directing the perplexed, cheering the disconsolate, and binding up the broken-hearted will, as he is pursuing his blessed work in utter self-forgetfulness, gather around him the love and confidence of his people, so that in time of trial they will be a living wall of defense around him against all his adversaries. This result cannot be bought. It cannot be consciously built up. It can be attained only by complete self-renunciation. Every minister is sustained by a degree of ambition; but never must he himself become the end of that ambition.<sup>7</sup>

One positive aspect about a minister with the self-sacrificing attitude described above is that he makes himself accessible to his people. The effectiveness of someone's ministry would come into question if he makes himself, or gives the impression that he is, unapproachable. There are those ministers who seem to be forever on their guard and come off as having a condescending attitude toward their people. From the scriptural record found in the Gospels, we can see that Jesus in His ministry never pretended to be better than anyone. He associated freely with the people. Children loved Him and came to Him without hesitation. He did not assume an air of dignity that separated tax collectors and sinners from Him. Making sure that people are always aware of his official dignity can make the minister seem offensive and disgusting. Any pretense, any show of superiority, is quickly resented and undermines any effectiveness in his ministry. There is no denying that the appearance of being pompous repels people.

But on the other hand, the minister of Christ has reason to be continually aware of his conduct in order not to be misunderstood and that carelessness in his attitude may not cause offense to his congregation. To throw all dignity of his office to the wind, and to indulge in all the pastimes and forms of entertainment to which people of the world are addicted, is never really an aid to his effectiveness or to real popularity; it could even prove to be a hindrance to the usefulness of his ministry. The minister is not to be exclusive and allow his office to make him unnatural in his relations with people. But he is never to forget that in every moment of his life he is to reflect the spirit of Him who sent him to serve in the first place. This also means that in the ministry there is no room for someone who is insincere, dishonest, unreliable, insensitive in the use of his Christian freedom, prone to displays of temper - in other words, someone who does not display the loving, gentle, humble heart of Christ. The minister of Christ is certainly in a position of honor, and his office should receive the respect and consideration which the Lord demands for it. Not to be forgotten, however, is the fact that it is an office of grace, not an office of merit.

It would be easy to confine our comments concerning those whom we serve to those individuals and families who make up our congregations. Christ, however, would have had something else in mind. In a certain sense, we could say that all persons are potential recipients of our ministry in the name of Christ. "When we follow Jesus we give up all right to choose whom we will love. He bids us love everyone. When we look at people through the lenses of God's love we do not see them as black or white, rich or poor, young or old, intelligent or retarded, but only as persons

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<sup>7</sup>Lindemann, *op. cit.*, p. 36 (Ambassadors for Christ, CPH, 1935)

in need of love and ministry." <sup>6</sup> /

This type of lesson was difficult for some of the first Christians to grasp. Jesus surprised His disciples by including in His ministry individuals to whom no self-respecting Jewish teacher of His time would minister - women, children, Samaritans, and Gentiles. Jesus gave the command: *"...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). The entire Book of Acts then records for us the history of how the Holy Spirit led the first Christians to realize and then put into practice the truth that God is indeed no respecter of persons. We know that truth, but perhaps there are times we find it difficult to apply it in our ministries. One example of how this might apply to us is when it comes to the variety of ages in the people we serve. It would not be unusual if we felt attracted to, or more comfortable in, serving one age group over another - the elderly as opposed to the youth, or vice versa. And it could just be that we are actually more effective with one of those groups. But the minister of Christ who has denied self will not arbitrarily let personal likes and dislikes stand in the way of ministry.

As we learn from Christ, we also see that His ministry was not channeled only into a select few of the needs faced by the people He served. Some presentday doctors, educators, counselors and psychiatrists serve people in this way. Christ, however, was concerned with, and dealt with, the whole person. Physical needs, emotional needs and mental needs were Jesus' concern. They will be our concern, too (recognizing, of course, that we do not have the expertise necessary to meet every need personally). Scripture teaches, however, that there are needs and problems in each of these areas because of sin; sin affects every area of life. Therefore, the spiritual need of people is primary. If we meet these other needs, but do not meet spiritual needs, we have failed ultimately. Spiritual needs will be met only when we witness to them by teaching all that Christ has commanded, sharing the gospel which is able to make them wise for salvation, communicating to them all the riches of God's grace, encouraging them to be part of a fellowship of believers.

We are all familiar with the varied opportunities we have for carrying out this responsibility in our ministry. But the encouragement received in our years at the seminary and then repeated by our brothers has not lost its validity - the sermon remains the avenue that gives us the opportunity to reach the most people and deal with their spiritual needs.

The sermon is not merely a speech or an opportunity to use this platform to support some pet argument. Perhaps we need the reminder more often that people come to church not because they want to know what the pastor thinks about this or that, but because they want to know what God has to say about it. The sermon is to proclaim a message from God. It is important, then, that this message be presented as a clear, simple communication that it is not lost because people could not understand it. If we want to talk to our people instead of talking at them or past them, then we will be willing to take the time to become acquainted with their attitudes, their interests, their way of thinking and their customs. Yes, if we wish to communicate the truth of God to people, then we must know not only what we want to say to them, but also how to communicate it so that they can understand us. It is also important, then, that this message not get lost in all the other details involved in the ministry. It is not a new encouragement, but

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<sup>6</sup>William M. Pinson Jr., *Ready to Minister*, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984, p. 40

it is a necessary one - we must have and find time to faithfully prepare for the time we stand before those precious souls entrusted to our care. And it does not require a great deal of effort to apply the thoughts in this paragraph to Bible classes and other similar settings.

Who are the people to whom we will be preaching? Well, they will all be people who have been exposed to a week's worth of the world's temptations and of the efforts of Satan to pull them off the path that leads to eternal life and to preoccupy them with the wants, problems and worries of this life. Some of them will be truly weary from the work and responsibilities of that week. Some of them will be pressed down with the weight of deep sorrow. Some of them will be dangerously indifferent concerning anything spiritual, and some of them may be teetering on the edge of giving in to some temptation. Some of them need sharp warnings. Others need, and are waiting to hear, some consoling words. Others need a boost in their courage. Still others need the encouragement to be patient. There may be some who are listening for the first time, others for the last time. But all of them, whatever their personal condition or situation may be, need a proclamation of the love of God in Jesus Christ, their Savior.

It should not be surprising, then, that we could well be feeling a mixture of inadequacy and intimidation as we step into the pulpit. That is natural, and may not be entirely bad.

...if for a moment we imagine that our ministry involves an exemption from the lowliness and contrition which become guilty men, we fall from grace, and our strength is withered. When we come from the cross heartbroken, and yet glad for the salvation which has been wrought in us, our words will be simple, our manners will be natural, and our tone will be none the less persuasive because it falters with the emotion of thankfulness for our redemption. Truly our weakness is our strength. When we feel our own nothingness, the grace of Christ is most magnified in our hearts. We must be able to say: "When I am weak, then I am strong."<sup>9</sup>

When the Holy Spirit leads a minister to realize the precious nature of the gospel as he applies it to himself, that same minister will fully understand what a Dr. Nichols was saying in his book entitled Preaching:

As the passion for gold absorbs some men and the passion for power absorbs others, so if a man is called of God to proclaim the unsearchable riches of the Gospel, all lesser ambitions will be swallowed up in his longing to lead men to Christ. Pitying their destination, distressed by their peril, realizing the pricelessness of souls for whom the Son of God thought it worth while to die, he puts all personal considerations aside that he may devote himself to the salvation of the lost. Like Paul he feels that necessity is laid upon him and exclaims, "Yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." Then will his sermons, shot through with the love of God,

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<sup>9</sup>Lindemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53



tinctured with the blood of the cross, be evangelistic in the true sense, and driven forward by the power of the Holy Ghost, they will find lodgement in the hearts of men. <sup>10</sup>

When we consider the priceless nature of souls, may we never overlook those nearest to us. Family life needs a minister's time and attention, care and planning. The family of a minister of Christ is no different than any other family - it does not thrive on neglect! Unfortunately, some men are so busy ministering to others that they allow little or no time for their own family. That is a violation of the priorities God had in mind with the blessings He has entrusted to our care. This would also send a confusing message to others we are attempting to serve in providing God's guidance for their family life. As grateful children of God, who by His grace have the added privilege of serving Him in love as ministers, we will also try to express that love in our home and family life. Instead of having a "master" attitude that we can do no wrong, we will humbly and sincerely strive to measure up to His command: *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:25; 6:4). One of the most important areas of our ministry may be to strengthen our own family. Allotting only one small paragraph in this paper to this subject is not to be construed as an attempt to minimize its importance. In fact, its importance is such that it probably deserves to be presented as the topic for a separate paper, and certainly deserves always to be at the heart of the mutual encouragement, and perhaps admonition, we receive from one another.

There are, of course, any number of occasions when encouragement and admonition will be offered between brothers in the ministry. Would it, perhaps, be worth our while to also take the time to briefly consider this particular relationship? If I offer such encouragement and admonition, how and why do I do this? If someone offers this to me, how do I receive it? Do I understand and appreciate the importance of this relationship?

### **III. The Minister's Attitude Toward Fellow-ministers**

Among the ministers of Christ, the term "brother" is not just some polite or sentimental title, but is a term that expresses an actual condition in a very special and unique sense. We are talking about men bound together by a direct relationship of service to the same Lord and Savior. The high privilege of serving Him, of dealing with His Word and Sacraments, of being engaged in working with human souls, establishes a bond between ministers which is truly unique in human relationships. Let's consider how this bond expresses itself, what the blessings of this bond are, and certain undercurrents that can, and do, damage this bond.

A minister of Christ is not unlike other individuals in that he has a need for companionship; in fact, he may need it even more than many others do. Where he is unlike others in this regard is that he is "forced" to find opportunities for social relaxation among his fellow-ministers. In spite of his countless contacts with people and the pleasant relationship which may exist between him and the people of his congregation, many times he is nevertheless not permitted the luxury of

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150

selective friendships with those individuals. If it were not for his fellow-ministers, his position could make him a very lonely man.

Yes, the minister of Christ does need companionship. And the reasons for this are not unfamiliar. It is quite possible that there come to the minister more than to other men times of mental and spiritual depression. The conscientious minister is filled, and at times overcome, with a sense of his responsibility and very often also with a sense of his own inadequacy to meet the particular demands of his position. He may be especially sensitive to failure, to injustice, and to misunderstanding. He frequently needs to have his perspective corrected and his balance reestablished. He must have someone with whom he can confide, someone who will sympathize and understand. He will have problems to be solved, for which he needs the unbiased judgment of others. He needs to meet with those with whom there can be a sharing of professional experiences. He needs the supporting hand and encouraging words of those engaged with him in the same high calling. And so it is that we find among the ministers of Christ wonderful friendships that are bound together by the love of a common Lord. It is unfortunate that occasionally there may be a minister who finds himself incapable of forming these attachments with his brothers, or having no desire to do so, and, as a "lone wolf," goes his own way. It is not only that he is missing out on some social interaction and relaxation, but also the educational value which a free discussion of professional problems and experiences is bound to have. He is also leaving himself more of an open target for the many and powerful devices of Satan than is necessary or wise.

As fellow-ministers of Christ, as brothers, we are all engaged in a tremendously important task. From Scripture, especially from Paul's epistles, we know that we are builders of the same structure; and the building stones consist of immortal souls. Satan has the one ambition of preventing the completion of this structure. He will use every possible means to realize his goal, including the weakening of this bond between brothers in the ministry. And he knows well how human we are.

The faithful minister, in his contacts with fellow-ministers, will feel the need of mutual helpfulness, which at times is best accomplished by means of mutual criticism. There is reason for this. It has pleased Christ to choose as His ministers humans that are afflicted with all the ordinary weaknesses and sinful tendencies to which all humans have been made subject since the Garden of Eden. Very often our faults have become so much a part of ourselves and have come on so gradually that they have escaped our attention. We are fortunate when among our brothers there are those who in all kindness and honesty point those faults out to us. They will draw our attention to some bad mannerism which has become a part of us, to some harmful habit we have acquired, to some temperamental tendency to which we are inclined. Here the "attitude of Christ" is of such importance once again - in the giving and receiving of criticism. *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 2:3-5).

Along these same lines, the minister of Christ will recognize that the talents distributed to himself and to his brothers by a most gracious God are going to differ in character and in number. Some have received ten talents, some five, and others only one. If, by God's grace, a minister has received a greater number of talents than his brother, there can be no connection to his personal credit. Rather, superior talents can be understood only in regard to God's grace and do

represent additional responsibility. *"...From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked"* (Luke 12:48). No matter how wonderfully a minister may be gifted, he will never find any excuse for pride or self-exaltation. Likewise, when a brother with fewer gifts observes another's superior qualities, he will be able to sincerely and enthusiastically appreciate them and to rejoice because of them.

It is true that envy is a sinful habit which is not entirely foreign to the ministers of Christ. Too often, even ministers are heard minimizing the outward "success" of a brother's ministry and speaking in a belittling fashion of his qualities. It seems that it should be unnecessary to admonish a minister of Christ to heed the Eighth Commandment and be careful not to give false testimony against a brother neighbor. "Perhaps the professional readiness of speech, impelled by the evil inclinations of the heart, from which even a minister of the Gospel is not free, lends itself peculiarly to quick and unjust pronouncement of judgment regarding the character and methods of those whose superior talents we grudgingly are compelled to concede."<sup>11</sup>

The true humility which must always be a characteristic of the minister of Christ is simply not in harmony with envy which may, in fact, be evidence of a strong desire for personal honor or recognition. One perhaps expects such an attitude with those who follow the "me first" philosophy of the world, but how can this find a home in the "attitude of Christ"? Finding real pleasure in public prominence, insisting on official recognition, an extreme desire of the limelight, a resentment when someone else gets the attention, and a refusal to "play the game" if one cannot be the leader - this basic desire for recognition is not new. It was there at the time of Christ, and more than once Christ found it necessary to rebuke the scribes and Pharisees as they were striving to receive the highest seats at the table and were very protective of the honor they considered their due reward. We find the same spirit even among the disciples of Jesus, and their desire for prominence in His kingdom deserved His rebuke. As that spirit continues to make its appearance today, be assured that His response has not been altered or softened.

There is another aspect in the relationship between brothers in this ministry that deserves our attention, and that involves the difference in ages, or more specifically, difference in years of experience. In reality, the older brother has a position of serious responsibility, and he may be instrumental in making or breaking the younger brother who comes under his influence. Scripture presents us with the picture of an ideal relationship between two ministers of Christ when it speaks of Paul and Timothy. In Paul's attitude is not even a hint of patronizing superiority. He respects his younger brother and has confidence in his ability. He encourages him not to allow anyone to despise his youth and praises the godly spirit he found in his young friend. There should never be a reason for younger brothers to show hesitancy in expressing themselves because of a feeling of intimidation in the presence of older brothers. No doubt this particular feeling is present most times simply because there is a personal uncertainty that goes along with inexperience. It can happen on occasion, however, that an older brother will unnecessarily, and we hope unintentionally, severely wound a younger brother with harsh criticism, especially when it is done in a public forum. He may preface his remarks with the words, "I hope my younger brother will not misunderstand me. I have his welfare in mind." And then he will proceed to take him apart with a flood of destructive criticism. Constructive criticism will be welcomed by any minister who has a correct attitude toward his ministry, but destructive criticism may often tend

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<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p. 93

may often tend to crush him and remove his heart for ministry.

This is not a one-way street, is it? Younger brothers may have times when they find it difficult, or they stubbornly refuse, to offer a listening and respectful ear to older brothers, and to consider the fact that there might be positive elements in the older-style ministry of an older brother. Here, too, a less than humble attitude demonstrated by words and actions can serve to destroy.

Really, it is immaterial to try to determine who might be in the wrong on such occasions, as long as each of us as individuals is humbly aware of our own sins and sincerely ashamed of them. It is then that it will also be easier for us honestly and willingly to admit when we have made mistakes in judgment, misbehaved, or failed in some other way. A humility worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit will preserve us from the conceited feeling of being infallible. It will make us more ready to respect the judgments of others and to work with them in a spirit of cooperation and understanding.

In all of this, it so easy to focus on oneself, but we are not just talking about personalities and people, are we? The relationship between ministers of Christ affects the ministry itself; it affects the outreach of the gospel message and how people regard Christ Himself. Again, what a blessing it is when brothers have been firmly cemented into a friendship through the love of the same Savior and a life of service with the same scriptural ideals.

As you probably have noted, there is no simple, defined line that clearly separates the minister's attitude toward Christ, toward the people he serves and toward his fellow-ministers; there is a certain amount of overlap involved. The same is true in one last area, but perhaps even more so since it definitely affects each of the first three and is, in turn, affected by them.

#### **IV. The Minister's Attitude Toward Himself**

When we take the time to consider ourselves and our ministry, any conclusions we reach oftentimes fall into the categories of fit or unfit for service as a minister of Christ. And then the question arises as to whether these are accurate or fair evaluations. This is where our own spiritual life - our personal use of Word and sacrament, as well as prayer - plays a vital role.

Yes, we have to confess along with the apostle Paul that we are the "worst" of sinners, that is, if we have the honesty to recognize what we see in our day-to-day lives. But we are also men who have been taken by the hand by the Holy Spirit and led to Calvary, and graciously have been granted a rich measure of comfort, strength and joy.

By the grace of God - how often we use that expression, and may we never use it lightly - we are ministers who have learned to apply the love demonstrated at Calvary to every aspect of our lives. It is vital that we continue to be persons who have learned through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit how to use effectively the love of God in Christ - when we are scheduled for surgery, saddened about a wayward child, praying for a sick spouse, looking ahead with uncertainty to the fast-approaching years of retirement, battling against Satan in congregational life, struggling with the preparation of next weekend's sermon, considering the intimidating evil of a very sinful world, counseling with a troubled individual, or seeking relief from an accusing conscience and the anguish of a fearful soul. The power of the Holy Spirit allows us to win the

daily struggle to give first place in our hearts to God, to let God be God. The greater our tasks, the more numerous our duties and responsibilities, the more pressing the moments of each rapidly passing day, the more eager we will be to turn to the Word so that it might be "*a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*" (Psalm 119:105), and the more eager we will be to turn to God in prayer as Jesus did throughout His ministry.

George Kraus made the following statement: "The church is painfully aware today of the term 'burn-out;' it is the newer word for 'nervous breakdown' or 'mental fatigue.' There is another term for it the church ought to remember - spiritual bankruptcy. The appalling lack of a proper devotional and prayer life among the clergy is no secret." <sup>12</sup> From the context of his comment, it is clear that Mr. Kraus did not intend to equate the cause for every case of "burn-out" with "spiritual bankruptcy." He does, however, present a caution to heed. A minister of Christ will consider as essential a strong, disciplined devotional life - a life centered on the Word and prayer. When we look to ourselves, when we look at the hearts of people, it is only natural that there would be apprehension, doubt, and even fear, that can quickly translate into stress. But how wonderful it is when we hear, and speak to, our gracious God! In the face of all the changes in a changing world, we have a God who is changeless. His Word does not change. When the times of stress come, and they will come, it does not have to lead to a collapse of will, of nerve, of energy, of commitment. With the strength and guidance provided through that devotional life, stress can actually prove to be an avenue to greater service. Our ministry will proceed in a positive manner, however, only in the measure that we turn to our Lord and His grace for strength, cling to the promises of His Word, and proclaim the message He has given for the ministry. We join with Paul in saying: "*I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*" (Ephesians 3:7).

Please permit a few additional thoughts on the importance of prayer. The minister of Christ, more than any other man, has need to pray. He carries not only his own burdens and needs before God's throne, but also the burdens and needs of the people he serves. More than other men, he needs the power of God's guidance. There will always be the temptation to regard everything pertaining to our ministry from a professional point of view, to allow our meditations to become nothing more than a professional "obligation," so an ongoing self-examination is necessary. Are we alone with God often enough and long enough? Do we manage frequently enough to get away from congregational and personal distractions to enjoy private times with God? We may have permitted ourselves to have so many irons in the fire that it seems next to impossible to find the opportunity for this. But we must find room for it. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, this also would certainly help to prevent another improper attitude that a minister may have toward himself.

It is in a steady relationship of listening to God and speaking with God that we will preserve that spirit of humility, which is so necessary for the ministry. "God cannot use us unless we are humble men. If a proud Christian is an anomaly, this is much more true of a proud minister." <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Kraus, *op. cit.*, p. 12-1

<sup>13</sup>Lindemann, *op. cit.*, p. 43

And it is pride, a lack of humility, that can so easily develop into an attitude of martyrdom as opposed to ministry. We convince ourselves, and may well give the impression to others, that our ministry is the burdensome obligation to bear a cross, rather than the joyful privilege to proclaim the cross. This is a more subtle form of acting like a "master" as opposed to a "minister."

Just how might this "martyr" attitude develop? Well, there is no denying that ministers may make many sacrifices when they minister. This is not something new and unique to these latter years of the twentieth century. At the same time, the makeup of congregations (location and types of membership) is different, and it seems that the expectations of congregations have changed since the turn of this century. Congregations look more and more to ministers to serve them through special interest groups and to meet the increasing demand for counseling - and these are only two areas. These demands are made on a ministry that is probably already busy. This, then, is the kind of situation where our human nature finds it easy to convince us that we are being obligated to make some sacrifices that other people do not have to make - salaries are comparatively low, work hours are long and sometimes unpredictable, etc. When such sacrifices and the effect they have on families are met with indifference or no sign of appreciation, hurt feelings and resentment may result.

Are these truly reasons for harboring bitterness toward our congregations, losing sight of what humble service means? The ministry is theirs, not ours. Our congregations have exercised their right and responsibility in calling us to their ministry. We may rightly expect respect for the office of the ministry, but we must remember that respect is not something to be demanded. As we learn from Paul in I Timothy 3, faithful work, concern for souls and love for people result in respect to the office in which we are privileged to serve. Perhaps there are times when the people we serve in our congregations need some gentle, but pointed, instruction as they formulate their expectations of the ministry. But is it possible that there is just as much of a need for us to consider our perceptions of the ministry. Our false perceptions can lead to false expectations on our part which could be an even greater reason for discouragements, anxieties, frustrations, and even depression which may hound us through our ministry.

It seems unlikely that any of us had the expectation that serving as a minister of Christ would be easy. Yet it may be true that we did not know just how demanding the work would be. Realistically, we cannot escape being involved in everyday affairs and the "busyness" of life. There will be monotonous chores. All of this is part of the life of those to whom we minister also. If this leads us to gripe about not being able to do our "real job," we may have once again fallen into the trap of claiming to be "different" - the trap of having a "master" attitude. A caution is in order here. These last thoughts should not be regarded by congregational leaders or members in general as justifying an often irresponsible way in which they use a minister's time and effort, and in so doing take him away from the teaching and pastoral work which is at the center of his ministry.

There is a somewhat related topic, and that is the potential for ministers to be asked to assume additional duties in cases of emergency (vacancies, sickness, consequences of unforeseen growth, etc.). In response to the question whether the call is flexible, Professor Erwin Scharf makes the following observation, which could easily be applied to ministry in general:

We are in the service of the Lord! Who knows better than he what

is being asked, how heavy the load, how long the day, how short the vacation! Who knows better than he, therefore, to whom to give extra strength, health and patience! If we really believe that, we are not going to be quite so speedy at whipping out our call and reminding loudly that the call does not ask us to perform those extra duties. }

But brotherly love happens to be like a coin with two sides. These are situations in which people who do the asking ought to consider more often and more soberly that there is only so much that dare be asked of an individual, if good work for the Lord's people is to result, and health, a precious gift of our God, is not to be impaired....It seems that if brotherly love and mutual love for the Savior are made the meeting ground on which these otherwise unhappy emergencies are solved, they would much less grow into tension builders. <sup>14</sup>

It is also doubtful that any of us entered the ministry with the expectation of great financial reward. The danger is still there, however, that dissatisfaction or complaining about money is one of the pitfalls of ministry. It will most likely always be the case that a sizable number of those we serve will have, and sometimes with not as much effort, more of the "things" desired by so many. But then is it not also true that many others of our members do with far less than we. It is also true that most of us could get by with less if it were necessary. Ministry is never served well when ministers act as though they can never get enough, or that they are not satisfied. May we never lose sight of the assuring truth that the ministry has other rewards that money could never buy - being able to work with the gospel on a daily basis, being able to serve God's flock, being able to raise one's family in a parsonage (yes, there are blessings in that), being able to enjoy the fellowship offered by so many fellow-Christians.

Another potential source of dissatisfaction as we minister are those times when we find ourselves with the perception that we have been misplaced as far as our current call. Professor Dobberstein makes an excellent point when he says:

- \* Hopefully, our expectations for place and type of ministry will never go beyond our present call to the ministry. Then I can truthfully say that there is no place that I would rather minister than right where I am. Then I can say that as far as I am concerned right now, this is where I plan to minister the rest of my ministry. And the best preparation for any other ministry which the Lord might have in mind for me is to be content and faithful in the place and the work into which he has already called me. If the Lord wants me elsewhere, he knows where I am. <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Erwin Scharf, "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. III, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991, p. 514

<sup>15</sup>Leroy Dobberstein, "Ministry: A Study," 1990 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Pastors' Institute, Part IV, p. 6-7

In any of our consideration of how people regard ministers and ministry, we indeed do a disservice to the people we serve if we attribute all difficulties in our ministry to their misguided expectations of what a minister of Christ should be.

The best perceptions were those that looked upon the ministry not so much as something we could be but as something we could do, not so much as something we could do for ourselves but as something we could do for others, not only as a service to others but as a service to our Lord who saved us eternally. Paul's words to the Corinthians offer the very best perception anyone could have for ministry. *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God"* (II Corinthians 5:18-20).<sup>16</sup>

It is when a minister of Christ has the proper perceptions of the ministry that it would not be surprising to hear the adjectives - sensitive, sympathetic, compassionate, gentle, caring - applied to his ministry. In a sense, these are all dimensions of the Christian love Paul was writing about: *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Ephesians 4:32-5:2). Only Christ Himself was totally fit for ministry. No one else is perfect, not even a minister the caliber of Paul. To see qualities, attributes and personality traits such the above could cause discouragement; but these are presented for encouragement, and with God's help and power they will be there. And coupled together with Paul's admonition to Timothy, we have a beautiful picture of the minister of Christ as he serves: *"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction....But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry"* (II Timothy 4:1,2,5).

We can search elsewhere, but is there a better source for advice for God-pleasing ministry than Paul's pastoral epistles? Professor August Pieper's comments on II Timothy echo Paul's words, especially those found in the first chapter (verses 8-12), and help us to focus on the purpose and blessings of our ministry:

Rebuke all ungodliness, yet with kindness; shut the mouths of those who oppose you, and in view of Christ's imminent return be unswerving in preaching and teaching the Word with great patience and careful instruction. What is at stake here is the salvation of God's elect. This is how I have conducted my ministry, and I have not been put to shame. The Lord stood by me, delivered me from all persecution, and strengthened me, so that through me the

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5



gospel might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. Now the Lord will deliver me from the last great evil and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. *For I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day* (1:12).<sup>17</sup>

There perhaps is no position on earth that can offer mere humans more opportunities to wonder at the infinite grace and always effective goodness of God than a minister of Christ. No man is so good or worthy that he can claim the privilege of this position as his right, or find reason to flaunt it before others. If God in all His unsearchable love has, despite our unworthiness, granted us this privilege, may we always be filled with humble joy as He uses us - body, soul and mind - all to His glory.

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9

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