

Dirk DeWinkle

Greyfriar's Hall

8/3/2010

## **Gravity of the Ministry**

We live in a world that has made a mockery of the pulpit. Unfortunately, the church leads the charge in mocking the ministry. She's failed to maintain high standards in calling men to the ministry. Rather than following the Scriptures, she's looked to the world for guidance regarding what is acceptable in her leadership. The result has been appalling.

Limp-wristed, feminine men gravitate toward the role. Women are called, and now homosexuals are donning the robe. TV preachers with their shiny hairstyles, expensive suits, and gold-plated knickknacks teach a health-and-wealth gospel. Many men become pastors because they think the ministry is decent pay without heavy lifting. Ministers' children are so notoriously ill-behaved that the term "PK" (Pastor's Kid) has become an excuse for the behavior. Finally, the men who truly seek to honor God in their call find themselves increasingly marginalized in our society as fundamentalist religious quacks.

In contrast to this, I believe the call to the ministry is a very high calling, with heavy responsibilities, not to be taken lightly or thoughtlessly. In order to prove this, we'll see: First, that the Bible's standards for ministers are extremely high. Second, that the office demands much of ministers, if it is held honorably. Third, that the consequences for unqualified and wicked ministers are dire. And fourth, that society owes respect to the office of minister.

## The Bible's Standards for Ministers are Extremely High.

The Bible has much to say on this topic. When Jesus came down to establish His kingdom here on the earth, He did not leave His disciples without guidance regarding eligibility for the leadership of His church. Moreover, He codified it explicitly through the Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul in Scripture.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim. 3)<sup>i</sup>

5 ... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (Tit. 1)

These lists are fairly exhaustive. Bishops really need to have all of their ducks in a row. Not only do they

have to exhibit their qualifications positively (blameless, one-woman man, hospitable, etc.), but also negatively (not given to wine, not violent, not greedy, etc.). Also, they must display their proficiency in their lives prior to ordination (able to rule his own house well, faithful and obedient children, able to teach.) Elders really are called to be the complete package.

Not only are the standards for the ministry high, Paul exhorts Timothy to exercise patience in ordaining men. “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels ... do not lay hands on anyone hastily.” (1 Tim. 5:21-22) Patience is necessary because of the gravity of the call and the trust which God, churches, and congregants place upon ministers.

Another reason for the great wisdom required in calling men to the ministry is the fact that pastors occupy a very visible public position. They are examples to the flock<sup>ii</sup>, and the New Testament frequently warns us of the dangers of false teachers. To display the public nature of the call, let us look at the duties ministers are required to perform.

### **The Office Demands Much of Ministers.**

Ministers have weighty responsibilities, they are called to represent Jesus to the church. They do this in the pulpit, in the study, and in the home. This job is not an eight to five, forty-hour-a-week job. As we've seen, it requires a commitment to faithful, sacrificial service from the heart of the man who is called.

The most visible part of the minister's job is leading public worship on Sunday mornings. This alone is a very demanding thing. He must faithfully expound God's Word, applying the Bible and administering the sacraments to God's people. This requires diligent “labor in the word and doctrine,”<sup>iii</sup> and it requires him to prepare his heart to serve in this capacity by prayer and meditation. “And who is sufficient for these things?”<sup>iv</sup> No one is, of themselves, but God gifts men with the ability to fulfill their

calling. (Rom. 12:6-8; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Eph. 3:6-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)<sup>v</sup>

Next, a minister must be “able to teach,” “to exhort and convict those who contradict.” In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded the apostles to teach their disciples “to observe all things that I have commanded you.”<sup>vi</sup> These responsibilities are met in the pulpit, but also in the classroom and the counseling office. Pastors must apply Christ's teaching to His church generally and specifically. This demands great knowledge of the Bible, and tremendous volumes of wisdom. This is very important, because the church is filled with sinners, and leading sinners can be a lot like herding cats. Thus advising people about how to live demands patience, strength, and wisdom.

Another duty of ministers is to comfort and console those in their flock who have special needs. Elders should be plugged into their people's lives. They need to visit the sick, the elderly, the widows, and the orphans. This means that pastors should know their flock and how they are doing, so they can account for the flock when the Great Shepherd requires it of them.

Ministers need to be wary of offending in anything. This is a daunting challenge when you consider the nature of their work. A pastor's job requires the offense of challenging sin and defending the truth to sinners. What Paul tells us is that ministers need to beware of offending in anything *else*, so that their ministry isn't hampered. “We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.” (2 Cor. 6:3) The way this is accomplished is by wearing your love on your sleeve, being willing to suffer various trials for the sake of the Gospel: “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings ...” (2 Cor. 6:4-5)

And if all this wasn't enough, ministers further represent Christ to the world. They are the public face of the church in their communities. Over time, churches tend to resemble their leaders. This means that a pastor's strengths and weaknesses will be magnified. A minister's only hope is to rest in the promise of Christ, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age,”<sup>vii</sup> and die to himself, that

Christ may live in him.<sup>viii</sup> Again, “who is sufficient for these things?”

### **The Consequences for Unqualified and Wicked Ministers are Dire.**

Paul informs us that rulers “must give account”(Heb. 13:17)<sup>ix</sup> for their leadership, and James warns us that teachers “shall receive a stricter judgment.” (James 3:1) Paul also tells us that sinning elders are to be rebuked publicly. “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” (1 Tim 5:20) These texts show that elders are accountable, and how to deal with sin in the leadership. Now let's look at those elders who are unrepentant and leading the church astray.

The NT regularly warns the church about false teachers, deceivers, and antichrists (Matt. 7:15; 24:11,24; Mk. 13:22; 2 Cor. 11:13; Col. 2:4,8; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim 3:13; 4:3-4; Tit. 1:10-11,16; 1 Jn. 2:18-19,22; 4:1,3; 2 Jn.1:7). In a few places it talks of the punishments false teachers deserve or receive. Paul cursed the false prophet Elymas with blindness on the island of Cypress. (Acts 13:6-12) In Galatians, he pronounces a general curse on anyone who preaches another gospel: “If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Gal. 1:8-9) In Revelation 2:20-23, the wicked prophetess, Jezebel, is sentenced to sickness, and her children to death. In Revelation 19:20, the false prophet is “cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

In 2 Peter 2, Peter takes a whole chapter to talk about false teachers. He says they will “bring on themselves swift destruction.” (vs. 1) “For a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.” (vs. 3) By referencing the doom of the fallen angels, the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah, he argues that God can destroy the wicked and yet preserve the righteous. (vs. 4-10) False teachers “will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of

unrighteousness.” (vs. 12-13) “[False prophets] are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” (vs. 17) Because these false teachers have rejected the truth found in Christ, Peter proclaims: “It has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.' ” (vs. 22)

In the gospels, Jesus teaches that “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. (Mark 9:42; parallel passages: Matt. 18:6-7; Lk. 17:1-2) Based on an *a fortiori* argument, this doesn't bode well for evil teachers. Now, if we take all of these passages seriously, we will find that *hellfire* is not too strong a description of the consequences for wicked ministers and pastors.

That said, there is no lack of biblical motivation for ministers to respect their office. They have much to answer for if they do not, they should seek to follow Paul's admonition and "work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2:12) Preachers are not the only ones who need to honor the ministry, but they are the first. Now that we've seen that biblical standards for the ministry are high, the work is demanding, and the consequences are dire, let's look at our fourth point.

## **Society Owes Respect to the Office of Minister.**

The office of minister is a high calling and an honorable one. Paul tells us that he who desires to be a bishop, desires a good work.<sup>x</sup> The society of the church by default owes respect to her elders. They are her *leaders!* The Bible commands church members to submit to their elders (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:12-13). They are also commanded to provide for their elders (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:3-14). In these ways, the church honors the office. However, the world should also respect the office, because ministers, as the mouthpieces of Christ and the church, proclaim the gospel.

Society at large will also one day be brought into the church, i.e. subjection to Christ. Jesus came

to earth and established His heavenly kingdom here. His kingdom will overcome the societies of men until they are all destroyed or brought into the fold.

9 ... God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11)

God not only exalted Him, but “He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For 'He has put all things under His feet.' ” (1 Cor. 15:25-27)

Jesus reigns by means of His Spirit in His church. He gave power to His disciples and His church in Matthew 16: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (vs. 19) God is Lord over the whole earth and there is nothing that escapes His sight, His power, His grace, or His love. Therefore, the nations of the world do well to “kiss the Son, lest He be angry.” (Ps. 2:12)

The reason that society owes respect to the office of the minister is because it is only by means of a minister that they have hope of salvation.

13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”<sup>14</sup> How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “ How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:13-15)

## Conclusion

So what about all those bad preachers I referred to at the beginning of this essay? We are Calvinists, and we believe that God is in control. They are wicked servants, but they need our prayers and our pity, because right now, God's curses lie heavy on them and their works. Sure, they continue to mock Christ and marginalize the ministry, well... their sort of ministry. But godly men, faithfully serving God in their pulpits will be blessed and God will use them to counteract the foolishness of the wicked and shine His light into the world. God did this in the Reformation, and He can do it again.

The world will take notice when God sends His Word into it. Jesus is reigning in heaven, and He will reign till all His enemies are made subject to Him. The church in this world is a church militant. She needs godly *men* serving as her captains and generals, men who will take responsibility and work diligently in their post, and when they do, God will work in the church and through her. *Soli Deo gloria.*

- i All quotations are taken from the NKJV Bible.
- ii Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:3)
- iii 1 Tim. 5:17.
- iv 2 Cor. 2:16.
- v Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:6-8)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant. (2 Cor. 3:5-6)

That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, (Eph. 3:6-8)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (Eph. 4:11-12)

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:10-11)

- vi Matt. 28:20.
- vii IBID.
- viii For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (Rom. 14:7-8)
- ix Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17)
- x 1 Tim. 1:3.