

The Changing Needs Of The Public Ministry

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Challenges And Changes In The Ministry

I. *It's a different world for children, parents, teachers, and the church.*

We live in a different world. According to the Fullerton Police Department and the California Department of Education, the top seven discipline problems in the public schools in the 1940's were: 1) talking; 2) chewing gum; 3) making noise; 4) running in the halls; 5) getting out of turn in line; 6) wearing improper clothing; 7) not putting paper in the wastebaskets. Fifty years later the list looks like this: 1) drug and alcohol abuse; 2) teen pregnancy; 3) suicide; 4) rape; 5) robbery; 6) assault; 7) burglary; 8) arson; 9) bombings; 10) murder; 11) absenteeism; 12) vandalism; 13) extortion; 14) gang warfare; 15) abortion; 16) venereal disease.

Things certainly have changed! Educational reseachers point to the demise of the American family as the culprit which has changed the face of American secular education. In fact, as Americans head into the 21st century, the changes affecting the family itself has become one of the biggest stories of our generation. At once venerated and vulnerable, the family is experiencing unprecedented change.

The family's struggles and problems are spilling like raw sewage into the life of Christian congregations and its programs. Changes in family life and the decline in the stability of the family may be the most significant factors facing congregation leaders and planners today. The trends which are cited in the first portion of this presentation are intended to demonstrate that the "family-centered" congregation and the characteristics which traditionally have been defined as a "normal" childhood are becoming less and less a reality as we move toward the end of the century.

A. *Social Factors*

1. Today, the nuclear family consisting of a husband wage earner, a wife homemaker, and two or more dependent children, that was once held up as typical and normal, account for less than 10 percent of all households. (*The State of Families*, p. 8)
2. Though over 90 percent of Americans presently marry, by the year 2000 this figure is predicted to drop to 85 percent. Stemming from the weakening of religious, social, and legal taboos, greater sexual freedom will promote continued growth in cohabitation, single-person households, unwed single-parent families, and homosexual couples. (*The State of Families*, p. 7)
3. The ages at which men and women have been marrying for the first time have been increasing rather steadily. In 1986, the median age at first marriage for men was 25.7 years and for women was 23.1 years. (*The American Family*, p. 5)
4. Young women today expect to have, on the average, two children. Small families, for several reasons, will remain the norm in our society for the foreseeable future.
5. In 1980 one out of every two first marriages ended in divorce. At the present time it is more accurate to say this trend will decline slightly to perhaps forty to fifty percent of first time marriages ending in divorce. (*The State of Families*, p. 8)
6. Of all divorced people, eighty percent will re-marry, half within three years. Over sixty percent of re-marriages will end in divorce. Thus pattern appears to be here to stay. (*The State of Families*, p. 8)
7. Single-person households were 10 percent of the total households in 1955. In 1984, they were close to

- 25 percent, with additional growth predicted in the near future. (*The State of Families*, p. 8)
8. Nine of every ten single-parent families in the United States are mother-child(ren) families. Currently, close to one-third of the nation's 60 million children under eighteen live with only one parent. In addition, half of all children have spent some time in a single-parent family before reaching the age of eighteen. (*The State of Families*, p. 10)
 9. Sixteen percent of all married couples today involve step situations and there is little question that the proportion will continue to grow. Tomorrow's children will grow up with several sets of parents and an assortment of half and step-siblings. Over the next five decades secular society will redefine its concept of the family. (*The American Family*, p. 8)
 10. Traditional sex roles for adults within the family will continue to undergo modifications arising from the repeated changes which education, work, recreation, leisure time, and pursuit of career will bring about in family life style. (*The State of Families*, p. 11)
 11. Research indicates the average couple spends only 27 minutes a week talking with each other in open, accepting conversation. In addition, the average child, age 10 and older, talks with Mom and/or Dad, only 14 1/2 minutes a day, with 12 1/2 of those minutes receiving commands or reprimands. That leaves only 2 minutes a day between parents and child for "quality" conversation. Additional research indicates that Dads may spend as little as 37 seconds a day with their children. ("How to Strengthen Today's Family" Video Tape A, Program 3)
 12. The birthrate among teenage women has risen 141 percent. Over two-thirds of all first births to teenage girls occurred out of wedlock. 20 percent of America's births are out of wedlock. ("How to Strengthen Today's Family", Video Tape B, Program 5)
 13. Minority group populations - Black, Hispanic, Asian - are growing at a faster rate than Whites, due to births and legal and illegal immigration. By 1990 it is projected that there will be more than 50 million Blacks and Hispanics in America. More than 40 percent of Black families are single parent families headed by women, a jump of 35 percent in a decade. (*The State of Families*, p. 25)
 14. If present trends continue, in a 40-member class graduating from high school in the year 2000: two class members will give birth before graduation; eight will drop out of high school; eleven will be unemployed after graduation; fifteen will be living in poverty; thirty-six will have used alcohol; seventeen will have used marijuana; eight will have used cocaine; six will have run away from home; and one will commit suicide. ("Skills for Growing," DiRaddo)
 15. Crimes committed by adults and juveniles in America are terrible and getting worse. Of the industrialized nations, the only country with a worse juvenile crime record is England. In 1980, 65 percent of all teenage deaths were due to violent causes (i.e. car accidents, suicide, homicide). ("How to Strengthen Today's Family," Video Tape B, Program 5)
 16. In the home, children attend the television set for more hours annually than they attend classrooms. Between absent working parents and a general social permissiveness, there is usually little parental guidance in program selection. (*The State of Families*, p. 40)

B. *Economic Factors*

1. The middle class will be further weakened economically by corporate restructuring. Witness the fact that social agencies are increasingly seeing first-time clients, formerly members of the middle class, coming through their doors with problems associated with lower class poverty. (*The State of Families: Work and Family*, p. 12)
2. Women who want work, family, and motherhood may find it difficult to perform all roles adequately. Men, too, are torn by conflicts between family and work values. A growing temporary solution to role conflicts is to postpone or avoid marriage while pursuing a career, although some couples may live together in the meantime. (*The State of Families: Work and Family*, p. 14)
3. Women enter the workplace from all types of family situations. In 1985, work-force participation rates

for married women were 48 percent with no children at home, 68 percent with children from six to seventeen years of age, 54 percent with children younger than six years, and 49 percent with children younger than three years.

4. Two-thirds of working women claim to work out of necessity. They are either single, divorced, separated, or have husbands earning less than \$15,000 a year. (*The State of Families*, p. 69)
5. Women are expected to constitute forty-eight percent of the total work force by the year 2000. Current statistics indicate that full-time jobs are being held by seventy percent of all working mothers. (*The State of Families*, p. 62)
6. Wages and salary increases over the next decade are predicted to show a modest four percent growth. The middle class is shrinking in size. There will continue to be regional differences in wage prosperity. During 1981 to 1985 the average wages in the Heartland declined significantly compared with those in the bi-coastal states. (*The State of Families: Work and Family*, p 23)
7. For a majority of Americans, work is central to their identity, their self-esteem, and their life goals. (*The State of Families: Work and Family*, p. 13)

C. *Psychological Factors*

1. Shifting values have shaken the confidence of parents regarding the value orientation of their children, particularly in the middle class. Parents have doubts about their responsibilities, their capabilities, their rights and appropriate values for dealing with children at all ages from infant to young adult. (*The State of Families*, p. 8)
2. The persisting high divorce rate and existing family structures suggest that perhaps value shifts and other changes in society are creating expectations for the family which are much higher than previous generations. Sharing, intimacy, and emotional support are set too high to be sustained by many people forming families. (*The State of Families*, p. 10)
3. The changing system of values in America encourages life styles with patterns stressing lack of permanence, variety, short-term time orientations, and self-fulfillment. (*The State of Families*, p. 11)
4. Ours is a complex and technological society. As society increases in complexity and technology, family insecurity will increase. (*The State of Families*, p. 58)
5. The family unit, for the most part, remains committed to the physical security of all members, hence to such needs as food and shelter. ("The American Family" p. 16)
6. The family remains committed to the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development of its members, and hence is committed to creating and sustaining the sense of being valued, the sense of being cared about. ("The American Family," p. 16)
7. Research among Christians has shown that parents have identified their basic needs. The five concerns of parents are: to understand themselves and their adolescent; to know what makes for a close family life; to understand and model moral behavior and purpose in their children; to know how faith can be made central in their family life; and, to know where to turn for, help in crisis situations. (*Five Cries of Parents*, p. 2)
8. Families appear to be lacking in the confidence or know-how to deal with the complexities of marriage and raising children. Witness the rise in commercialism of marriage and parenting education materials.

D. *Spiritual Factors*

1. Shifting values are fueling changes throughout society in America. The American family - long celebrated as the social institution most impervious to change - has been forced to adapt to many of these value changes. This adaptive process will accelerate over the next twenty years as the debate over the health of the family heats up. (*The State of Families*, p. 7)
2. Evidence of a declining faith-life can be seen throughout the major Christian bodies of America. Church

leaders are reporting a general decline in all areas of congregational activity. In a recent book *American Mainline Religion: It's Changing Shape and Future* authors William McKinney and Wade Roof reveal the startling fact that between 1952 and 1987, the American Protestant majority slipped from 67 percent of the population to 57 percent. As many as ten of the largest Protestant denominations, are in the throes of what can only be described as a serious religious depression.

3. The leaders of many church bodies have begun to view the Christian education agency approach inadequate to produce mature Christians in the modern sense. The trend is to re-enlist the home as a close ally. Church renewal has been spawned by the insistence that Christian education agencies are no longer productive. This trend began to develop in mainline Christian churches during the 60' s and has recently surfaced in the WELS. (*Family Ministry*, p. 28)
 4. The majority of church bodies in America are advocating unscriptural stands on family issues such as abortion, the role of man and woman, divorce, marriage, and homosexuality.
 5. Church attendance, Bible class attendance, stewardship, and church growth figures are at best, in a state of equilibrium, or in actual decline, within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.
 6. WELS training programs for called workers give a greater amount of emphasis to providing help for families and individuals in crisis than with strengthening families which are well.
 7. Interfaith marriages continue to increase, resulting often in homes of mixed values and mixed lifestyles.
 8. Understanding the relationship between teaching religion, teaching the Word and nurturing faith continue to be difficult concepts for many Christians.
 9. The number of children and wives being reported as abused emotionally, physically, or sexually is increasing. Witness the fact that 1.5 million cases of child abuse and neglect are reported annually in the United States. Of special note, emerging as an issue that will increase in visibility over the next two decades, is reported incest. (*The State of Families*, p. 36)
 10. The number of adult bookstores across the country currently outnumber McDonald's restaurants by a margin of a least three to one. The hard core pornography industry is growing rapidly, estimates are that it currently grosses 8 billion dollars annually. ("How to Strengthen Today's Family," Video Tape B - Program 2)
 11. Religious influence has been lost due to the rise of secularism. And with the loss of influence has gone a great deal of religion's significance. No longer does the church influence hospitals, public schools, the government, or even society itself. At the same time the church is the one institution in society which has the potential to touch people at all of the significant stages in the life cycle - from birth to death and all of the touchstones in between.
 12. Today's Christian families mix the two value worlds in which they live. Some secular values when applied at home, clearly conflict with the traditional values of church and family.
 13. Many single-parent families feel excluded from congregational offerings because they believe that they are directed at two-parents-and-their children family. (*Five Cries of Parents*, p. 28)
- II. ***The ministry of the Lutheran teacher has been impacted by the forces affecting the family, society, and the church.***
- A. *The spiritual condition of the Christian family presents special needs for ministry.*

The changing family scene is causing significant problems in today's classrooms. There are single parents, child abuse, drug and alcohol problems, neglect and loneliness caused, in part, by broken marriages and conflicting work schedules, absence of extended family relationships, and a seemingly weakened commitment to Christian Living.

How to meet the needs of the children before us in our changing classrooms is an ever increasing challenge. Teachers certainly need to be well trained in current techniques of effective instruction if they are to provide children Gospel-centered training. While teachers recognize that they are on the front line when it

comes to dealing with families, many are hesitant to support a ministry with a scope which goes beyond the classroom.

B. *Today, many called workers are bringing spiritual and cultural "baggage" into the ministry.*

Pastors and principals are spending an increasing amount of time counseling and assisting co-workers with problems identical to those of the students, parents, and spouses within their congregations. District Presidents will tell you that the number of parsonages and teacherages within the WELS which are in need of some type of counseling assistance is growing at an alarming rate.

The demands of the ministry add additional stress for even the "well families." Furthermore, parishioners may not always be sensitive to the fact that their demands may be, in some instances, unreasonable.

C. *Secularism has created a loss of respect for the ministry.*

The solid commitment of men and women to the teaching and preaching ministry, along with a strong work ethic appears to be lessening. A growing sense of materialism and self-gratification have caused ministers to become preoccupied with concepts such as increased salary benefits, free time, family time, vacations, home ownership, car allowances, health insurance, etc.

A great deal of misunderstanding and abuse of the doctrine of the call exists among congregation members. Congregations expect pastors, teachers, and principals to fulfill their callings in a manner similar to which businesses are run. We are living in an age of professionalism. Parents have come to expect called workers to have teaching skills and a level of proficiency similar to their teaching counterparts in the public school. As in business affairs, little patience is shown when ineptness is perceived. The "hire and fire" attitude has undermined the basic tenets of the doctrine of the call.

Unfortunately, the principle of "lean and mean" may have also become a part of the church's thinking as it deals not only with called workers, but also with programs. A criticism which is commonly heard concerning our Christian education system is that it has lost its affectiveness. There is a growing expectancy among congregations and church leaders that Christian education ought to be "cost effective" in terms of spiritually productivity.

D. *Administration is rapidly becoming a specialized ministry in many congregations.*

Compartmentalization continues to become an accepted method of efficiently ministering to the needs of people. And perhaps this is rightly so. Increased administration does have its detractors. Specialized ministers are perceived by some as being remote from the lives of ordinary people and somehow less credible.

The role of men and women in the teaching and preaching ministry continues to cause hurt, resentment, and misunderstanding between men and women.

E. *The school setting may very well be the only secure environment in the lives of the majority of today's children.*

Today's schools, out of necessity, have been forced to assume responsibilities which belong to the realm of parenthood. The struggle which schools face is one of trying to provide a "quality" education while meeting the new physical, emotional and educational goals which society has imposed upon them. In addition, the matter is further complicated by the fact that many parents are not willing to take ownership for their children's education. Many parents falsely believe that Christian education belongs to the church and school.

F. *The growing population of Blacks, Hispanics and Asians can no longer be ignored in the ministry of the WELS.*

At a recent conference on the middle school age child, a futurist foretold that the kindergarten class of the year 2000 would be made up of an enrollment of 35% white students. This startling figure points to the rapid cultural changes which are taking place across America. Congregations and schools of the WELS may not be willing or knowledgeable enough to adapt their ministries to other cultures.

III. *Changing Ministry Issues - Discussion*

A. *Proactive/Reactive Ministry*

There are two types of ministry: a first kind, proactive, is a ministry directed to individuals that are spiritually healthy, having as its goal on-going spiritual growth; a second kind, reactive, is a ministry of compassion designed to help troubled families overcome obstacles that stand in the way of spiritual growth. Each of the ministries requires a different strategy.

- Our approach to programs involving ministry has traditionally been to expect people to come to us. How do we bring ministry to those who seem to need it the most?

B. *Pre-eminence of the Word - Curricular Concerns*

The insidious attacks of secular humanism upon Christianity continue to plague the church, families, and American education. Many Christian educators appear to be more tolerant/permissive when dealing with material which has been developed by secular humanists and quasi-religious authors. The pre-eminence of God's Word and Jesus Christ as personal Savior must be clearly established as the source of truth over and against the theories of humanistic psychology and its gurus as the guiding Light for Christian families.

- Do WELS pastors and teachers clearly see the need for a cradle to the grave curriculum which defines activity in terms of the mission and purpose of the church?
- The teaching and preaching ministry is a Gospel ministry. In some instances the church's programs do not support family life. Are congregations/schools becoming too involved with activities which may be ultimately, counterproductive to ministering to families?
- Is there a need for curriculum planners to address the issue of affective learning for adults and children?
- People often express concern for "quality education" rather than Christian education. To what extent has the "success" orientation been fostered by both a high expectation society and the Church Growth Movement?

C. *Ministry Roles*

- It is unfortunate that in our present day through the process of defining, refining, and redefining ministry we have in a sense gone beyond focus to a point where role distinctions have become blurred by too much definition. In some cases the roles are themselves jealously guarded to the detriment of ministry. For others, role distinctions may have become a way of finding limits to service.
- It is incumbent upon educators in the WELS to be involved in the ministry of the church. The task of balancing profession and ministry are limited by time, training, and inclination. How does the

conscientious teacher effectively balance the increasing demands placed upon his ministry without burning out?

- Congregations are beginning to look at elementary schools, prep and area Lutheran high schools as "luxuries." The blame may be partially ours. What have we done to give people the impression that the teaching ministry is not vital to the life of the congregation?

- What strategies will serve the church best as it attempts to re-enlist the home as a primary partner in the Christian education process?

- How can the issues which center around women and ministry be defused in a way that will be God-pleasing and benefit the church?

- Should the teacher training program add a fifth year for the purpose of better preparing its ministers for an expanding ministry?

D. *The Changing Economy and Demography*

How the economic and demographic challenges facing congregations are being handled will determine the scope of the ministry for years to come. This is not a time to become mired in tradition and resistant to change.

- Many feel that those who use the Christian day school should bear a greater share of the financial responsibility. Is this reasoning based on sound stewardship principles, or is this a "knee-jerk" reaction to the shrinking charitable dollar?

- As the pastoral shortage becomes a reality, what role will teachers play as congregations consider alternate forms of ministry?

IV. *The Parish Ministry Today*

Do we always realize how quickly, how greatly, things changing? All of us can become so absorbed in what we are doing, there is always so much, too much to do, that we may hardly notice what is going on all around us. Who of us hasn't been so involved in what we were doing, whether work or play, that we lost all track of time and couldn't believe how late it was when we finally did look at the clock on the wall.

We have all been working hard, faithfully pursuing our various callings in the public ministry. But while we were faithfully laboring for our Lord, we may have lost track of how unfaithful to God the world all around us has become. And I don't mean the distant world, the world of the TV newscast and the weekly news magazine. I mean the world all around us, the world with the name of our town on its cover.

The world has changed; our world has changed. The same basic problem is still there and it is still called sin, at least by God it is. The same solution is also still there, the gospel, thankfully it is. Yet, as we work together with our congregations to present the gospel, to even use the law, the dynamics at work in our congregations may be different, changing with the times. To serve our people faithfully we need to be aware of these changes.

And so to begin I would like to make some comparisons between then and now. Then is 22 years ago, 1969 to be exact, when I was a fresh young pastor, married only a year and childless, just beginning my ministry in South Windsor, CT. Now, today, is 1990, one year before my oldest child will graduate from college, from DMLC to be exact. What changes have these 22 years brought to the parish ministry?

I remember hearing, while at Northwestern, that one day we would be the "whole cheese". It was not

said proudly but matter of factly, conveying the reality as it then was. Pastors were, then, very often, the "whole cheese". From stoking the furnace, to mowing the grass, to shoveling the sidewalks, they did it all. And, what is more, the congregation let them be the "whole cheese". And it wasn't just in these mundane, janitorial duties. It was in everything! Whatever the pastor said, went. It went a long way, if not all the way, in determining what a congregation would do.

For the most part, then, the members of our congregations were not as well educated as they are today. The pastor knew it all, or so the people thought. The pastor was in charge. If they thought he was wrong, no one said a word, at least not publicly. Who would even stand up to the pastor?

Respect for the ministry was high. A pastor could remain in one pastorate for 50 years or more and the District President didn't hear from a different person each week asking how they might get rid of him. Though he may have grown old, somewhat less effective than he once had been, he was still the pastor, their pastor.

Because he was their pastor, hardly any family event could go on without him, or so it must have seemed. The pastor was as much a part of family life as old maid Aunt Tilly. Consequently, almost in a family way, congregations took care of their pastor's material needs. No, there may never have been an abundance of dollars that came his way but food was always supplied in abundance. And if not at his home, then at the homes of his members to which he and his family were invited frequently, not infrequently to two different places on a Sunday.

Those were the days when a house was still a home! More mothers than today were still at home, raising their families not the family's income. Most family problems were just that, family problems, handled in the privacy of the family circle.

Outside the home, one of the chief places a family went was to church. And because at home already the Bible was a familiar book, people were not spiritually illiterate. They didn't have to be told who David and Goliath were; they knew. And while they still sinned, they knew it and were ready to confess it and anxious to receive the assurance of the Savior's pardon.

While nostalgia may be taking over, forcing me backward more than 20 years, to the way I remember Dad telling me it was, let's take an even closer look at how it really is for pastors today.

We're certainly not the "whole cheese" anymore! Our congregations are highly organized with many highly educated, professional people in positions of leadership. Almost any good sized congregation, as well as some not quite so big, have people on their boards who could sit, and do sit in the boardrooms of America. They are highly organized, professional people who want to get the job done and don't want to sit around all night just talking about it. They do have a lot of free time, perhaps more than people have ever had before, but they do not want to use it all up on church work.

Church work used to be a family tradition. Grandpa, in fact, may have been church president, or treasurer, for 30 years or more only to be succeeded by his son for the next three decades. But now, in the third generation, the grandson might not even come to church. Or, if he does, even if he is a regular church attender, he may be far less inclined to accept nomination for the church council.

More likely than not, the former pillars of the congregation are experiencing problems in their families their forebearers never knew, or even talked about -- divorce for one. We are dealing, even in our Christian congregations, more and more, with fractured families. We are dealing a great deal of the time with families whose temporal as well as spiritual head is a woman, more likely than not a single parent.

And even as we may feel threatened by this non-traditional family, not quite knowing how to deal with it and so not really dealing with it at all, at least not well, so we may feel intimidated by the likelihood, before too much longer, of being in the minority racially. We are very rapidly running out of our own kind of people, as someone has called them. White, Germanic people, with a few Norwegians and Swedes and an occasional Irish man thrown in for good flavor, will soon be the minority in many areas of our country and, one day, perhaps, in our churches, too.

These points may seem to be overdrawn, even pessimistic. Perhaps they are. The intent, however, is simply to make a point, to show the changing needs of the ministry today, to help us become "all things to all people."

As I see it, from my still limited experience of 22 years in the parish ministry, among all the things that have ever been required of parish pastors, the following are particularly needed today.

There is a real need to be submissive. Superiority has had its day! A congregation will not stand, or even sit still, for a pastor who has to have it all his own way. The day is long gone when, as long as a pastor had something to say, whatever it was, everything would come out OK in the end. Today, more than anything, a pastor has to be a listener, one who is sincerely and earnestly concerned about what others have to say. Today, more than yesterday, a pastor needs to be sensitive to the needs of women since so many of them are managing households all by themselves and have no other man, other than him, to whom to turn. And today, while always upholding respect for the office of the holy ministry, the pastor must never give the impression the ministry begins and ends with him!

In trying to "be all things to all people," in seeking to meet the changing needs of today's ministry, are we attempting to be and to do too much? Are we laying a further burden of guilt upon our pastors who are already in danger of burning out because of feelings of frustration and inadequacy? Are we, like some congregations today, expecting our pastors to be more than even God asks them to be?

I don't think so, not if we ask no more of them than God expects of all of us who labor in His service. And to see just what that is, let us, briefly, review again the requirements for the office of the holy ministry as God inspired Paul to give them to us in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

Even if others no longer see it this way, God still does. The saying is true, the office, of the ministry is a good thing, task that we ought to be eager to assume. We can rightfully desire to be overseers, those who with purpose and love look out for the spiritual needs of others. It has dignity and importance attached to it not because of what it does for the one occupying the office but because of what it is able to supply to those being watched over, the spiritual benefits which the office is able to bring to others. Selfish interest, self interest, is ruled out.

To be of spiritual benefit to others, Paul says, the overseer must be blameless. But before we empty this gym, honestly admitting by our action that not one of us is blameless, we will need to note the kind of blame which would disqualify us from being an overseer.

Importantly, heading the list, is that we are to be one-wife husbands. This phrase has nothing to do with, as some suppose, legislating against a clergy widower ever marrying again. Rather, Paul is speaking to married men about the absolute purity with which they ought to honor their marriages as well as the marriages of others.

Particularly today, with so many single women in our congregations, with so many intimate counseling needs of women, absolute purity is required. For the credibility of our ministry, not even the suspicion of impropriety must stain our dealings with women!

In all our dealings with women as well as with men, we need to be temperate and self-controlled. Temperate expresses the idea of keeping our head in all situations, not being unduly influenced by what we see or hear all around us. Self-controlled is to reflect sober, mature judgment in everything, to be clear-minded in all we do.

Someone who is always clear-minded, making sound judgments, will appear to be respectable. Everything in his life will seem to be in its proper place. His life and all that he does will be displayed in an attractive, appealing way.

Hospitality may seem, today, not to be such a necessary virtue for a pastor. No longer is the parsonage the only place someone who is travelling can find lodging for the night. And yet what such hospitality displays, the grace of giving, the being ready to share, is still very necessary even when it is not our home but all else,

including our time, that we are willingly sharing with others.

Able to teach, as I believe Paul wants us to see it, is more than just being able to impart facts and figures. It's being able to be taught, to realize the source of all knowledge is not from within ourselves. It is being willing to teach, in a non-condescending manner, to share with others what we have received ourselves. And for them to listen to what they are being taught by us, it will be necessary for them to see in our personal lives that we, too, have benefited from what we first have been taught.

One of the things we should have learned and should be able to give good evidence that we have learned, is that the Christian teacher ought not be one who sits long alongside the wine. Our German heritage notwithstanding, we can not perpetuate the legend that Lutheran Christians turn the other way when the sin is having too much to drink. Too many other evils, all of which make us not apt to teach, are likely to attend excessive drinking. This is especially true today when even the secular world seems to be recognizing more and more the dangers of alcoholism.

While excessive drinking, it has often been shown, may be the result of a low self-image, a quarrelsome person may well have too high an opinion of himself. If he did not think so much of himself and his opinions, he would not be so ready to defend them. He would not argue so forcibly, he would not be so inclined to argue even with his fists, if he did not think so much of himself. Instead, a Christian teacher should be kind, meek, gentle, peaceable, considerate of others, recognizing the gifts of grace they have received as well as he.

Such a person, recognizing all that he has, including his money, is a gracious gift from God, will not be a lover of money. Money will be seen, then, for what it is and what it isn't. It's not a god; it is a servant. It was not meant to be worshiped but used by us as its real owner, God, determines.

One of the other gifts God may choose to give a called servant is his family. And because it, too, is a precious gift to him from God, like all of God's other gifts to him, it was meant to be managed well. Like any other gift of God, it needs to be managed. And so, if this gift we are unable to manage in an appropriate, God-respecting way, how can we really manage any other gift or responsibility from God?

Human nature being what it is in all of us, it takes time to reflect on God's gifts, to appreciate them truly as gifts, not as something we have earned or deserved. And that is why a recent convert, someone as yet new to the faith, may become conceited. It takes awhile; we don't learn everything right away. God must work on us for awhile before we fully realize all we are, all that we might become, is not because of the raw materials in us but because, with us, He has created something new from scratch.

Today, especially with what has happened in the religious, post-Baker world with the disgrace which has been done to Christianity through professing Christians, even church leaders, it is imperative that church workers have a good reputation with those on the outside. In every aspect of our lives as they are observable to and by others, our lives need to be exemplary. Satan would still use our weakness to make sinners secure, justifying their sinful behavior by ours. The Savior would still use our strength, His forgiveness, to make sinners secure, justifying their sinful behavior, showing them, by the pardon He has given us, that there can be pardon for them, too.

What it really comes down to is that the needs of the ministry have not really changed. Sin is still sin, grace is still grace. But while outward, earthly circumstances have changed, what God may well be showing us is that, when he listed, inspiring St. Paul to write them, the qualifications for the holy ministry, every last one of them was important. We, over the years, may have grown careless in our application to us of some of them to the detriment of our ministry in this day and age.

In summary, then, I don't believe God ever intended for a minister to become proud of his office even if it is God-given! As the Savior indicated, even He, God's perfect minister, came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for all of us. (Matthew 20:28) God fully intended us to respect the talents and abilities He has given, just as freely, just as fully, to others, including lay Christians so that from him "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Eph. 4:16)

Even as God expects us to listen when He talks to us, so, too, God expects His called servants to listen, letting others do at least some of the talking, showing that we really do care about them and their needs. And,

finally, God meant for us to deal with the women in our congregations with the respect we all owe our mothers, with the faithfulness, those of us who are married, we owe our wives.

And so, when we be what God wants us to be, even as He is, we can be "all things to all people." Then we will have met the changing needs of people.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Is there something about our system of training pastors which intensifies the natural pride of our sinful self? If there is, what can be done about it?
2. How come a pastor would display a lack of respect for the spiritual gifts of others, particularly those of lay Christians? If this is so, how can we change it?
3. While we need to be able to communicate effectively verbally, how can we train our future pastors to be better listeners?
4. Why is it that our pastors often have difficulty understanding and communicating with women? If that is so, what needs to be done about it?

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