

Brotherly Admonition

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The purpose of this essay is not to review the whole spectrum of church discipline. This subject is well covered in books on pastoral theology and doctrine in your home library. Rather it is the assignment and purpose to limit the scope of this essay to brotherly admonition among us as pastors. This is a pastoral conference, and therefore we want to review our brotherly relationship as outlined in the Scriptures.

From time to time our attention is drawn by the news media to scandalous behavior and unprincipled conduct of professionals who use their office for their own aggrandizement. We might think of psychiatrists who engage in liaisons with female patients, attorneys who swindle insurance companies, or stock brokers who manipulate clients' portfolios. The ministry is a profession not immune to scandals or lesser peccadilloes. The pastors are subject to the same temptations, weaknesses and human failings as others. The problem arises when brotherly admonition and discipline are not used to regulate the conduct and teachings of the clergy.

We have been observers to fifty years of declining disciplinary practices in American religious life. I'm sure we all have become stunned by clergy of notorious reputation. Male, and yes female ministers too, who are remembered for their immorality, divorces, corrupt fund-raising schemes, deceptive practices and doctrinal aberrations. Church history books are full of examples of evil clerics who deceived others and yet succeeded in gathering a following of devoted disciples. And never are they disciplined for their sins, so it seems.

This lack of discipline ought to be a warning to us, reminding us that the doctrinal purity, the confessional loyalty and Christian deportment of our pastors is not a treasure that is guaranteed to us in perpetuity. We can lose it as other denominations have lost it. What we have inherited in the Wisconsin Synod is a prize to be kept and guarded. Far from viewing this news, therefore, with Pharisaic pride, which thanks God that we are not as other men, we can only thank God for His undeserved blessings.

I. The Use of "Admonition" in Scripture

A thorough Scriptural study of the Biblical terms for admonition or discipline is beyond the scope of this paper. To illustrate, consider the number of common English words used in the Bible to treat this topic: *admonish, instruct, warn, correct, discipline, train, exhort, educate, advise, charge, direct, order, urge, counsel, recommend, demand, bid, decree, preach, press on, incite, encourage, suggest, require* and *command*. Even this is not a complete list. Now consider that there is a Greek word and sometimes two or three to convey the thought of that English verb. In addition there are Hebrew words which do the same. As I researched these words, I discovered that an essay the size of a novel would be needed to cover the Biblical terms.

However, there are two key words which teach us a useable definition of "admonition." The first is the word *νουθετέω*:

As "admonish":

"We proclaim him, *admonishing* and teaching everyone." (Col. 1:28)

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and *admonish* one another."
(Col. 3:16)

"Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those...who *admonish* you." (1Thess. 5:12)

As "warn":

"And we urge, you, brothers, *warn* those who are idle." (1 Thess. 5:14)

"I am not writing this to shame you, but to *warn* you." (1 Cor. 4:14)

As "instruct":

“I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to *instruct* one another.” (Rom. 15:4)

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and *instruction* of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4)

Thus we see that the purpose of God was carried out by the apostles as they confronted the understanding of people and caused them to think about the message of sin and grace. We do the same as we admonish, warn, and instruct, literally “put in mind” the will and teaching of God’s word.

A second important word is *παιδεύω*, which means to “bring, up, instruct, train, educate.” It also means “to practice discipline, to correct or give guidance.” So Scripture employs the term as follows:

“I was *thoroughly trained* in the law of our fathers.” (Acts 22:3)

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline...because the Lord *disciplines* those he loves.” (Heb. 12:5-6)

Some Biblical examples of this “confrontation of the understanding” and “discipline training” can be recalled. Jesus confronted Peter, not omitting a single aspect of his sinful denial. “Note the charcoal fire, reminiscent of the fire at which Peter denied the Lord, the reference to the proud boast (John 21:15; cf. Mark 14:29), and the threefold question corresponding to the threefold denial.”¹ A consistent ingredient of brotherly admonition is Scriptural judgment, words of restoration and commissioning to service. Another example is seen in Nathan’s confrontation of David after his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba. It evoked a repentance before God.

From the New Testament again comes an example of Paul’s teaching regarding discipline of the idolatrous and immoral man at Corinth. Sin had to be judged! Paul taught that the sinner had to be confronted. This was not an option to be exercised, but a command of God to be obeyed. Truly the church of Jesus Christ has been granted heavenly authority when exercising the powers of admonition and discipline. The failure of exercising admonition is decried as evil. The young church was under obligation to act.

In God’s economy, merely living longer or having more experience does not necessarily qualify an individual for commendation. A tragic illustration of one whose leadership became increasingly defective as he grew older is the Old Testament priest, Eli. From his example we see where admonition and discipline were lacking, that sin germinated to scandalous proportions.

II. A Brief Survey of Matthew 18 and its Application

The classic doctrinal basis for admonition and discipline is verses 15-13 of Matthew chapter eighteen. However, when we look at the whole content of this chapter we see other considerations which our Lord also wants us to bear in mind when dealing with our brother. His earnest warning against offence points up the urgency of admonition, while His parables of “The Lost Sheep” and “The Unmerciful Servant” display the love and forgiving spirit of God.

The need for admonition often arises from the kind of attitude displayed by the questioning disciples. “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (1). Consequently Jesus shows that the lowering of oneself and the becoming ‘humble like a child’ are precious details of brotherly admonition (3,4). Even Christ’s heroic statements of cutting off an offending limb (8,9) illustrate the deadly termination of undisciplined sin.

Then with the picture of the good and sacrificing shepherd seeking the lost sheep still before our eyes, God’s Word to us continues with the *locus classicus* of discipline, “if your brother sins, admonish him alone” (15). Jesus knew well that admonition should seek the most favorable atmosphere by speaking to the brother alone. Sinful pride will often reject the correction if one might lose face in the presence of others. Besides, there ought to be no distractions to the Word.

The responsibility to act lies directly on the shoulders of the brother pastor who knows of the sin. He must approach the matter with a “putting to the mind” as Jesus requires. The use of the Greek perfect tense of

“bound” and “loosed” indicates divine ratification of an earthly action in a completed and final state (18). God is therefore vitally interested in the disciplinary work, but extreme care should be exercised, lest we do on earth that which heaven cannot ratify.

Of course, it would be Peter who would have more to say and ask, “How often?” (21). Peter got the drift but was concerned about himself and wasn’t going to let anyone step all over him. It is in response to this that Jesus teaches the parable of unlimited forgiveness and mercy (23-35).

To say the least, God knew what He was doing in giving us this instruction. Never will there be a pure church or a pure ministry. Error does come. It does! Jesus spoke sharply to the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira (Rev. 2). Don’t say it can’t happen. It did then and does now. These things “were written down as warnings for us” (1 Cor. 10:11).

Perhaps Matthew 18 will become clearer if we review an example that was “written down as warning for us.” Paul’s public, face-to-face rebuke of Peter (Gal. 2:11-14) is such an example of love in action. Because Peter was in the wrong, because his behavior betrayed the freedom of the gospel of grace relating to the ceremonial law, Paul had to confront Peter. Christian love, yes, the word itself, required an admonishment, a putting to the mind of Peter, the principles of freedom and the condemning of hypocrisy. In the long view, this was necessary for the maturity of both Peter and those who were present. Paul sacrificed his friendly relationship with Peter for a higher principle of love.

III. The Necessity for Admonition

Pastors in attendance at a conference hardly need to be told that they have a human nature inclined to sin. None of us would question this truth. But perhaps when we are personally involved and have become the object of an admonition, the clarity of consciousness about our own sin becomes blurred. Just at such a time as this it must be remembered that the church is not some kind of mutual insurance company whose object is to protect its pastors in every situation. Rather, it is a fellowship with a purpose of representing Christ to the world and demonstrating truth and righteousness. Christ’s honor has been committed to the church’s keeping. Therefore the integrity of the pastorate must be kept, even if a personal admonition is required.

Pastors, because they are human, are influenced and tempted by the immoral posture of society. They have TV’s in their homes. They too hear of the types of movies, magazines and entertainment available “out there.” Some in our American culture today are dedicated to turning human beings upside down by making the cerebral subordinate to the visceral or to the genital. Often what they describe as avant-garde, bold, daring, or creative is simply turning the human being upside down. Pastors can become tainted by this thinking.

Perhaps one of the “biggest” temptations to the clergy is the “numbers” game. The desires to have the fastest growing church, more members than another, more confirmations or baptisms or raising more funds than a neighboring church are a few of the temptations of pride that lurk in us all. To attain these higher numbers it will require some shortcuts or deceptive practices. It is truly amazing how the human mind can rationalize the need for deception to gain an advantage “for the Lord.” One such example comes to mind concerning a certain evangelist who hired students to come forward for the altar call to “prime the pump.” Another is about the cleric who asked his audience to bow in prayer and then invited those present who wanted to “receive Christ” to raise their hand. Then he said “Thank you, I see your hand, I see your hand,” when in fact no one had yet responded. Of course, eventually a few hands went up, but only after some manipulation for the Lord. Have you ever wondered if the Lord would approve of all the numbers reported in the *Statistical Report*?

A further need for admonition is to preserve the unity of our confession. Paul exhorts us all to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). The Holy Spirit by regeneration, faith, and a new life joins us all spiritually. Once established, this unity is to display itself in the oneness of confession and practice. The pastor’s membership in the Synod is such an expression of oneness, a confessional act of agreement. Our Wisconsin Synod exists with a triangular relationship, that is, a membership of the pastor (also male teacher) in the Synod, and the congregation as a member of the Synod. The congregation and pastor have a direct

relationship through the call. “It is especially when problems arise that the relationship as it has been set up among the three can be mutually helpful and enable Christian brothers to come to one another’s aid.”ⁱⁱ

Fellow pastors should naturally have a close bond of fellowship, a sense of kinship more intimate than those found among any other group of professionals. The common ideals we have in the gospel permit no soaring, selfish ambitions, no self-centered planning of a career, no personal aggrandizement. To keep the unity, pastors owe one another brotherly admonition because “you have only one Master and you are all brothers” (Matt. 23:8).

There are always telltale signs that call for brotherly admonition. Just as the congregation at Corinth knew it had a problem with a particular member, so does sinful conduct have a way of rearing its head. Often, however, our plain old faults are lurking around and become so much a part of ourselves, that they escape our attention. Fortunate indeed is the pastor who has a friend who in all kindness will point out for correction his fault.

A more serious telltale sign needing admonition is the observation that the “fire is dying.” Perhaps not enough time is spent in the glow of the cross altar on Calvary. Perhaps in the multiplicity of pastoral duties, the fire of the soul dies down. This identifies the great peril of the ministry—the 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 to lose the wondering sense of the holy Lord. We may have much to do with religion and yet not be religious. We may become mere guideposts, when we were intended to be guides. We may become so absorbed in words that we forget to heed the Word.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Perchance many pastoral failures root from pastoral discontent, the inability to reconcile oneself to the life of service. Again, consider the fault of pride. Jesus in His ministry was never anything except His true self. He associated freely with people, and children came to Him without hesitation. There was no barrier of assumed dignity. So any pretense by the pastor, any parading of superiority, immediately dissipates effectiveness. All pompousness repels!

It isn’t humility to vie for honors or clamor for official recognition. The pastor of Christ requires a spirit of utter selflessness and complete submergence of personal ambitions to the cause to which he has been permitted to consecrate himself. If the Lord Jesus desires to use us in a field of greater influence than that which we occupy, He will cause it to happen.

The welfare of Christ’s cause demands a professional loyalty, an *esprit de corps*, which calls for the defense of a brother in the face of criticism and which imposes the duty to speak well of him and to put the best construction on everything. Another telltale sign is the pastor who easily slanders or at least talks down a brother to make himself look better.

A pastor cannot avoid “the root of all evil” any more than others in this modern society can, and in fact, may be quite selfish and greedy with even the small recompense he receives. Sorry are the cases when the congregation or district official receives a letter from a local store stating that the pastor who had taken a call to another parish, had left without paying his bill. How distressing it is to be told by a local businessman that when he confronts a man who carries a New Testament in his vest pocket, he is cautious in business dealings, because of unfortunate experiences.

No doubt our very distant forefathers of the middle ages had something like this in mind when they instituted the threefold monastic vow. It surely relieved the cleric of “some” temptations.

IV. Our Duty Before God

Never, never forget that God has a purpose with you, pastor. You are called by the Holy Spirit as part of His plan to teach and spread the Word. You are God’s instrument! So your eternal welfare is God’s concern.

Because He has chosen you to your calling, God will work to keep you true to your ordination vow. Consequently, when Jesus leads a fellow pastor to bring the corrective admonition of His Word to your mind, He is doing it for your spiritual good. Jesus was a “friend of sinners.” He desires to salvage every sinner. He’s your friend, too.

We are to understand that we *are* our brother pastor's keeper. As God seeks to prevent the self-destruction of a soul, we too will want to prevent sin from overthrowing us or a fellow pastor. We are engaged in a tremendously important task for God. It is Satan's work to encourage and develop sin to hinder the ministry. The schemes of Satan are well-known. How many times in history has the cause of Christ been injured due to a church's failure either to exercise spiritual discipline or to effect restoration?

In 1866 Samuel Stone wrote these lines of a hymn:

Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed.^{iv}

How true! Why is this so? The answer lies in the failure to exercise admonition and discipline training. Most church problems begin as a small cancer, and unless detected and treated immediately, they grow to corrupt and kill. It's no accident that a shepherd's rod is used as a symbol of the ministry. The staff was used to discipline and correct wayward sheep determined to go astray. The pastor is also part of Christ's "flock."

Speaking words of brotherly admonition is not one of the more joyful duties of the ministry. In fact, you would probably prefer to attend another "committee" meeting than drive to your brother pastor's home for corrective discussion. Yet since it is part of our gospel commission, we go. We go in humility, in gentleness and in prayer for guidance. It has to be done for a soul's sake.

God has given us the means for brotherly admonition. It is the law to expose sin and the gospel to heal the wound. Since "through the law we become conscious of sin" (Rom. 3:20), an application of the law is most necessary to make our fellow pastor conscious of his sin. Again, we repeat, a reluctance to become involved in a disciplinary action will arise quite naturally. And yes, Satan certainly will remind us to mind our own business and not be so judgmental. Here the Word must be exercised against our hesitancy to act.

There is not a man in any calling upon the earth that needs more steadily and in a greater measure the abiding and forgiving grace of God than does the pastor. If we know and sense this need for ourselves, how much more applicable it is to the pastor friend who had been made aware of a sin: Luther rightly commented that a Christian is both justified and a sinner. Lie are conscious that we are *simul justus et peccator*. To wallow in the sense of our sinfulness and to forget that we are justified is to reveal lack of faith in God's grace and Christ's redeeming work.

God has also prescribed the method or procedure for brotherly admonition. It probably starts with the question, "Whose duty is it to speak to the sinning pastor?" Jesus told us that. It is the one who knows the sin. (Matt. 18:15) The responsibility of dealing with the sin rests first and always with him who knows of the sin. In our Synod there is machinery set up for supervision of doctrine and practice. The office of circuit pastor was created for this purpose, while the ultimate responsibility lies with the District President. But it could be a great mistake for the church to leave all matters of discipline up to these pastors. Only when we all assume the duty to be responsible for the doctrine and practice of our church, will we have a healthy and vibrant ministry of the Word.

The brotherly admonition, as stated before, is to be given privately with consideration. "Honest" and "evangelical" are two good adjectives to describe the content of brotherly admonition. Concerning the pastor in error, "hold (him) in the highest regard in love because of (his) work" (1 Thess. 5:13). Love is the key: Here also a word might be in order to warn against a fault-finding attitude. We need to be on our guard lest we impede our efforts to win the brother by affecting an air of intellectual superiority or by letting personalities intrude.

We also recall that discipline is for training purposes not punishment. "Brothers," Paul wrote, "if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But match yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

V. Specific Circumstances

It would now be in order to treat a few specific circumstances that can be commonly recognized. Since sin is so multitudinous and so varied in texture, composition and intensity, it is hardly claimed that these examples are definitive. They may, however, serve as a basis of thought and discussion.

The pastor's personal life is a place to begin. The complexity of his responsibilities coupled with family pressures often serve as the springboard for trouble. It may reveal itself in attitudes of defeatism, worthlessness, guilt, depression, envy or being a "lone wolf." Let's look at these in greater detail.

The ministry of mainstream America is presently caught in a down-draft. Results are now being felt in the pews across the land. For example, since the G.I. Bill has run out, many seminaries are facing a radical drop in the number of applicants. There is a constant and ever growing drift of pastors out of the ministry into other professions or from the pulpit to less taxing forms of social work. A national poll revealed a deep questioning about the commitment to the parish ministry. A common pastoral response was, "It simply has too many pressures and too little return." These may be only straws in the wind, but the gale is arctic. Some clergy have expressed frustration over the declining moral values of their congregations. They feel caught up in the whirlwind of supporting a status quo and with putting their imprimatur on the mores of a prevailing middle class culture.

Some pastors have reported an earnest problem of wrestling with a guilty conscience. Too much work to do, too many responsibilities to handle, too little time in the day and too softhearted to say "no" has pushed them into the corner of guilt and frustration.

The relationship of these problems and their besetting sins is probably quite evident to you. These pressures, frustrations and guilt all relate to self-management. And quite probably this might be a serious problem and temptation, for the pastor who doesn't understand how to be a good steward of his time. We heard a good essay on this subject six years ago, "A Minister's Stewardship of His Time," by Pastor Mark Hallemeier. A personal review of it might be a real encouragement to the frustrated and harried pastor.

Unjust criticism and a lack of appreciation are probably sisters to the sins named above. Our hearts must be kept free from resentments and bitterness and even recriminations which are natural reactions.

If anyone ever had a "right" to get disgusted with people and get downright, depressed, it was Elijah. Calloused and indifferent is the apt description of his unbelieving nation. Shocking is their lack of response to the Carmel victory. Elijah felt himself a failure. He was grimly depressed. In response, the Lord nourished him and then confronted him with the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and finally the still small voice of comfort, love and forgiveness.

An athletic coach could tell any of us, "You give up first in your mind, then your body quits." If we give up in our minds and let our emotions throw us down into despair, we are failing to hear the "still small voice" of God's mercy for sinners.

Also to the opposite extreme remember that praise is like horse liniment, that is, it is not to be taken internally.

We like the story of Cinderella because virtue is rewarded in the end. Isn't that an American ethic? But suppose a different ending to the story. Instead of Cinderella being chosen to leave the position of servant in the kitchen to be a princess in the castle, her prince joins her in the kitchen as a servant; suppose she found that to be the royal bride meant taking on the role of a servant and making a "heaven" of that? This Cinderella-complex is an undermining sin of the pastorate. It is not easy to be a servant and it doesn't come naturally. In fact, it is rather popular to gripe about how poorly we're paid and about how much we do!

Although the green-eyed monster is no relative to Cinderella, it is true that envy closely trails behind. Do you hear pastors minimizing the success of brothers and speaking deprecatingly of their qualities? The Eighth Commandment is to be assiduously applied to such talk, even as a Bible lesson of Jesus washing the disciples' feet applies to the former example.

A pastor needs companionship of his fellow clergy. He needs to have his mental perspective rectified and his balance reestablished whenever there is a veering off center. He needs to have someone to whom he can

empty his heart, someone who will sympathize and understand. He will have problems for the solution of which he needs the unbiased judgment of others. He needs an opportunity for interchange of professional experiences. He needs a supporting hand and an encouraging word. Unfortunate indeed is the pastor who goes it alone. One who is temperamentally incapable of forming intimate attachments with other pastors is a lone wolf who carries his burdens alone.

All of us preachers have the opportunity from time to time to sit in the pew. There we should lay aside our professional attitude and come as a worshipper, not a critic. We are sinners in need of spiritual nourishment. If we can't sit still for a brother's preaching, then we need to hear Luther's comments on "despising preaching and His Word."

A pastor's family life, getting along with his wife in Christian love and raising children who reverence the Lord, is another complex area that may call for brotherly admonition. Unfortunately, problems usually surface here long after help is beneficial. We should remember that we live in a secular world and not behind the walls of a monastery. The evils of society have a way of insidiously creeping into the parsonage.

What should we do when we are given a complaint against our neighboring pastor? "Be careful," is the best advice. The first thing to do is to ask if the problem has been discussed with the pastor. Only after you have positively assured yourself that this has been done should you listen to the complaint. "The best advice may be to send the person/people back to the pastor to try again and work out the difficulty."^v Remember, even listening may involve violation of the Eighth Commandment. If the word of God requires you to speak to the pastor involved, do so quietly, lovingly and in humility.

Let's now go to the pastor's study. Here is where his theological thinking is done, his sermons are written, his Bible classes are prepared and essays are composed. It is out of this study that he will speak his heart to other pastors, either with conviction or just in passing remarks. It will often tell us much about his thinking. It is here that the subject of academic freedom will surface. Academic freedom is the liberty to openly study and search for information, to conduct research and investigation into subjects of scholarship. It is to require the theology of the church to stand up and prove itself. Will there be limitations to academic freedom? To answer that question, take a mind's eye view of the theological book produced by the Lutheran publishing houses in recent years. There we have seen the permissiveness of "freedom" at work attacking the Scriptural foundations of our faith. There has not been a year done by that the leading publishers have not printed a book that either questions orthodox theology or else blatantly assaults the Bible. This is defended as academic freedom.

At this point we ought to be reminded that sinful man needs to be restrained in his logical process for the sake of the glory of God. Man is the creature. His freedom is never absolute, just as his rational powers are always tainted with corruption. In fact, freedom is an illusion.

"That limits should be set to our freedom is not something that surprise us. I would die and be silenced forever, rather than to destroy or to weaken the faith of one of my students in God's Word by my teaching."^{vi} So spoke and wrote Dr. Siegbert W. Becker of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. His conviction is expressed clearly for us to emulate. The Scripture is the inspired Word of God and not the evolutionary development of human thought. Our confessional position is not to "be looked upon as a limitation on our freedom."^{vii} Rather, he points out, the confessional position of the individual should be seen as a source of personal freedom.

It is a fallacious argument that says that a pastor should be allowed to teach at variance to the doctrinal position of the church. Since no one forces him to stay, honesty should give him the conviction to resign his call when he no longer believes in the confessional stance of the church.

There is an in-between area that deserves special care and treatment. It is in the area of adiaphoron. Here the pastor may question practices and customs of the church, without being called a heretic. His obligation is to act and teach in Christian love, and to be most cautious not to injure a tender conscience. However, among fellow pastors he ought to have the freedom to express thoughts openly, in order to test and train his thinking process. Again, we are not speaking of fundamental doctrines, but rather of adiaphoron practices, minor exegetical questions, historic judgments and the like. If a pastor has a more serious question of doctrine or faith

on his mind, he would do well to take up the subject among wise and close friends in the ministry, who could counsel and educate privately.

In writing a formal essay to be delivered at a pastoral conference, the pastor is under obligation to follow the assignment and practice of the conference as is common in our church. These points might serve well as a guideline. The essay is:

1. to be in agreement with Scripture
2. to be clear and edifying
3. to use terminology that communicates lucidly
4. to avoid intellectualism, and
5. to be new and fresh, but not as a fetishism.

His obligation is to present a formal essay that is factually correct and intellectually honest. He is to avoid terminology or style that is difficult to define or comprehend. His sentence structure is to be that which is commonly used in communication. The content and style should be written in consideration of the intellectual grasp of his audience. But to use a theological jargon to prove his own superior gifts is an insult to the listeners.

If a pastor should challenge the confessional position of his church in a public essay, he has to expect to be publicly admonished by the audience. If the church sits in silence to the questioning or challenging of its confessional position, it is inviting doctrinal deterioration to set in. If someone is bold enough to besiege the confessions of Scripture, he must be taken to task publicly by his audience. “Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Tim. 5:20). Then to resolve the matter in good order, let the conference assign the disciplinary handling of the matter to a smaller group to act in their behalf and report back at a later date.

A caution must also be expressed to the audience that they do not dump on the bandwagon of heresy hunters. Let cool heads prevail. If more time is needed to consider what has been written, let there be a postponement of discussion to give everyone an opportunity to reread and restudy the essay. It is here that the Eighth Commandment must be scrupulously applied, lest in exuberance we sin against our brother.

Turning to another subject, consider the problem of a lax practice on the part of a pastor. First, however, be sure to distinguish carefully between standards set up for yourself and those principles laid down in Scripture. If the pastor has become inconsistent in good practice, or has lapsed into sinful practices, God admonishes us to “restore him” (Gal. 6:1). The Greek *καταρτίζω* describes the surgical term to “put back into the former condition” as in the case of a dislocated bone that needs resetting. This implies spiritual help rather than punishment. This means spiritual healing of the gospel is to be applied.

The fact that lapses occur should be no surprise to us, who handle the Scriptures. The Book shows us numerous situations of spiritual lapses, as for example in the case of Moses. He permitted his exasperation to get the better of him. He struck the rock rather than speaking; to it, as God had commanded. And he was held accountable for his disobedience. Yet God forgave his servant; so we ought to do. Beware of that harsh and unsympathetic attitude that relentlessly builds up a case against our brother with cold legalism!

When the orthodoxy of the church is blurred by the false teaching or sinful conduct of the pastor, the eternal vision of the sheep will become dim-sighted. We have learned the need to practice discipline consistently with the Scriptures. Periodical spiritual examinations do much to insure the church of a confessional clergy. From Ezekiel we have the terminology that suggests that the loving shepherd causes his sheep to “pass under the rod” in a careful examination that all was well with the sheep. The discipline of attending conferences and being assigned an essay is, in part, to insure the orthodoxy of our confession.

Should the error become a persistent sin, or should the admonition of the church be rejected, the pastor will need to be terminated from his synodical membership. The Synod will also “inform the congregation directly of what has happened so that the congregation can ultimately make its own decision.”^{viii} So also may the congregation, which finds its pastor unfaithful to its confession, terminate his call. Since this does not happen frequently, the church will appreciate the advice of district officers of the Synod. Obviously, heretics are to be condemned and rejected. This subject is so well known among us, it hardly needs amplification.

VI. What We Owe Our Brother

The term “brother” is not just polite or sentimental affection, but is expressive of an actual condition of unity in Christ. As a brother we should expect to serve our brothers in the ministry. “Only when pastors are willing to encourage, strengthen, admonish, correct and reprove one another with the Word of God will a synod remain truly united and spiritually strong.”^{ix} The fact that we are united in a synodical membership keeps us in close contact with fellow pastors. This association serves as an incentive for study, mutual help and even correction. We serve as a check and balance for each other. Therefore, we should be willing to accept brotherly admonition, as we also are obligated to give it.

Our brotherly unity in the Synod puts certain obvious obligations on us., These include attending conferences and participating in them, also studying together, accepting essay assignments, attending conventions, receiving the Lord’s Supper with our fellow workers, and helping promote the work of the gospel in our congregation are additional obligations.

That these and our other responsibilities are carried out, will require us pastors to live very near the cross. We are but weak human instruments, which God deigns to use. Our accomplishments are of His mercy. To counterattack these natural weaknesses we need a firm commitment to the Word and trust: in Jesus’ promises. From the U.S. Navy’s presence in San Diego I’ve learned this fine illustration. When a ship is steaming across the Pacific, it can easily be thousands of miles from port or destination. At nightfall the ship’s position is calculated, the course is determined, the speed is faxed and other calculations are set, i.e. the state of the sea, the fouling of the hull, the direction and velocity of the wind and the current. The navigator plots all that on a chart. At morning light when the navigator recalculates the ship’s position, it will be right on course. In fact, you can sleep easily at night trusting that the ship will continue on its destination. The same principles apply to our ministry. We “sail” through life trusting the accurate guidance of God and His Word. Faithfulness to it, confessional agreement with it, will surely bring us to the right destination.

Brothers, we ought also to ask ourselves if we are often enough and long enough alone with God in prayer. We need to get away from the rush and distraction of “things,” to enjoy the secrecy and privacy in which God is our only companion.

Finally, we owe our brothers the individuality that God has created among us. Be yourself! Develop your own talents! Strengthen the weak spots. But allow for the characteristic differences in ability, talents and personality. Do not make the mold in which you were cast the model for other pastors. Great differences in the personalities and methods of Bible heroes is seen from Scripture. The greatest reformations that have stirred the world have been ushered in by men who refused to sink their own personalities under the dominance of the status quo. By grace each of us is what God has made us. Superior talents represent merely an additional grace, and incidentally, an additional responsibility. The brother who has been given fewer gifts will not be jealous, but rejoice with him to whom more is given.

VII. Conclusion

It would be presumptuous to imagine that we have covered this subject in its entirety or said it all. Yet if it has served its purpose to make us mindful of our role as pastor and brother to our fellow pastor, then good. If in some small way we have been led to review and reestimate our brotherly unity and its precious preservation, then this has been time well spent.

Most of you were blessed to enter the ministry in the years following the great struggle for orthodoxy. Most of us were reared with our confessional position taught from youth at our home pastor’s confirmation class. Just perhaps the “we’re-solidly-established” syndrome may have intruded into our thinking that the orthodox stance of the WELS is quite secure, and that our ministry need focus only on building the church. The battle has not been won. We are still in the church militant. Our treasure is still contained in “clay pots,” containers made of earthly stuff. How fragile and susceptible to damage and breakage we are.

O Lord, preserve Your Word among us!

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Endnotes

- ⁱ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 1970. page 138.
- ⁱⁱ Armin W. Schuetze and Irwin J. Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, 1974. page 356.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Paul Lindemann, *Ambassadors of Christ*, 1935. page 32
- ^{iv} "The Church's One Foundation", Stanza 4, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 473.
- ^v *Handbook for Circuit Pastors*, 1975, page 15.
- ^{vi} Siegbert W. Becker, "Academic Freedom at a Confessional Seminary," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, October, 1970, page 230.
- ^{vii} *Ibid*, page 230.
- ^{viii} Armin W. Schuetze and Irwin J. Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, 1974. page 356.
- ^{ix} *Ibid*, page 358