

Call to Obedience #326
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
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In Search of Ministerial Standards.

The Minister and His Disciplines Part 5

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**“Meanwhile live in such a way that you are a credit to the Message of Christ”—
Philippians 1:27** (Living Message Bible).

Whether a minister succeeds or fails as a pastor depends very much on the degree to which he gives himself to self-discipline. Undisciplined men have a mediocre success rate in the ministry. Because the lack of discipline leads to failure and dishonor, the end result is discouragement, depression, and a sense of futility. Many failed ministers blame others and circumstances for their demise, while in reality they have been their own downfall.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:26, 27, *“I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection...”* This is a physical illustration of the principles of Paul’s spiritual life. He deals with any disposition towards evil or any inordinate affection or passion by self-mortification, so that by rigorous discipline he may put himself completely under the dominion of the gospel of Christ. We must follow this example or we will be castaways. Let us look at eight disciplines that will help to keep the anointing upon us and upon our ministries:

1. The discipline of prayer and the Word.

A minister who fails in prayer is a minister who fails. If a minister does not have a prayer life, he does not have a spiritual life. Such a minister is disconnected from his Lord. Jesus did nothing without prayer to the Father. The Church was born at Pentecost when 120 people prayed (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4). The first Christians *“continued steadfastly in prayer”* (v. 42). The first ministers defined their calling in Acts 6:4: *“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”* It is not asking too much for a full-time minister to pray two hours a day. A pastor should consider his time well spent if he gives 15 to 20 hours a week to be alone with his God.

Thirty years ago I noticed that Paul said more than once that he *“ceased not to pray for them,”* (Col. 1:9; 2 Thess. 1:11). I said to myself, since Paul prayed for his people continually, certainly I could do the same by praying through the church membership list several times each week. God gave me so much more love for my flock when I began to take each one of them to His throne regularly! You must pray or leave the ministry.

You must schedule prayer; anything not scheduled will not be done. Prayer is the most important ministry of a pastor, and the study of the Word is the second.

2. A minister must be a shepherd of his family. This also takes discipline.

After prayer; pastors, ministers, evangelists, missionaries and prophets must expend energy on their families. Someone said that if Christianity does not begin at home, it does not begin. The minister must have an exemplary marriage relationship, representing the love relationship between Christ and the Church. He must never relegate his wife to the level of a servant, a secretary, or an errand runner. He must be a lover and treat her like a queen in private and in public, as an example of what marriage should be; or *"his prayers will be hindered"* (1 Pet. 3:7).

The minister must be the husband of one wife and have complete control over his children (1 Tim. 3:2-5). He (and every Christian man for that matter) is called to be a priest to his family. Again do not neglect your family, no matter how busy you become, or you will pay a high price for that neglect some day.

3. A minister must be discreet in his behavior towards the opposite sex.

Jesus said, *"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt. 26:41). The flesh is always weak, no matter how strong the spirit may be. When counseling with a woman, always keep the door of your office open, and have another person in the area. Do not travel alone with a woman unless she's part of your family or of old age. I know this may create a lot of inconveniences but remember what happened to King David, and how fast it happened (2 Sam. 11:2). Avoid embracing women other than your family. How many ministers have fallen into adultery with one of their parishioners? Be careful.

4. Exercise financial discipline.

Do not spend more than you take in. If you must take a loan, be sure the payments do not create a hardship on your family. The Bible says that if you have *"food and clothing be content"* (1 Tim. 6:8). *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things shall be added unto you"* (Matt. 6:33). You don't need as much as you think. Second-hand clothing can look as good as new. I did not get my first pair of new shoes until I was 19. My first suit came when I was 31, and I was 42 when I bought my first home; yet, spiritually, I was not impoverished at all. I was happier than most men, because I was resting in the arms of Jesus. Really, isn't our true home the will of God, anyway? It is only in His will that we find true happiness and rest. Jesus only had one robe. He could carry all His earthly goods with Him. The Apostle Paul's story is not much different. His testimony was *"But my God shall supply all your need according to the riches of his glory by Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:19).

5. A minister's appearance must reflect the dignity of his office.

The first impression is by far the most important. The mentality 'Come as you are, dress as you like' has no place in the Kingdom of God. The Levites and priests could not dress any way they liked: God ordered their garments. Jesus wore a beautiful expensive robe; He did not dress down to be "one of them". His clothing was appropriate to His holy calling; He kept His clothes and hair clean. You represent Jesus; don't look like you represent the world! You are an ambassador of Christ. I am not promoting fancy garments that draw attention to yourself; but neither should you look like you just came from a ballgame or picnic. If you have only old shoes, keep them clean and shined. Don't degrade the dignity of your calling. Don't embarrass your Lord or make him ashamed of you.

6. A minister must have credibility and be trustworthy.

What people tell him in the privacy of a counseling session must be kept private. He is not even to share this information with his wife unless requested by the counselee. His word must be good: what he says he must mean and what he promises he must fulfill.

A minister must not play the clown. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, associates jesting, joking, and foolish talk with filthiness (Eph. 5:3, 4). How often do ministers try to tell jokes? This grieves the Holy Spirit. Such a person will not be led by the Holy Spirit. Pretty soon, his preaching will not be taken seriously; his words will not be respected.

7. A minister needs the fellowship of his colleagues.

There is a divine corrective in Christian fellowship. No one is safe in his thinking and attitudes for very long without that fellowship. The devil tries to isolate pastors from one another. Jesus always sent His men out by twos. Elijah completely lost the perspective of his ministry when he separated himself from his servant (1 Kings 19:1-4).

A minister must never love his doctrines more than his God and his brothers or he will contribute to divisions and sectarianism. The first Commandment is for us to love God with all our heart, the second to love our brothers. In that we fulfill the law, and we have the right relationship to the doctrines of God. There was a heated doctrinal division in the early Church as recorded in Acts chapter 15, but because the apostles' love for God and for one another was greater than their love for their doctrines, the Jerusalem council ended in unity and without animosity.

A minister must be cautious. He must not get too close to any family of the church, unless there is a lot of maturity with all parties involved. I am saying this because of the weakness of the flesh. There are certain ones who have the Aquila/Priscilla calling towards their pastor, to aid the minister in a special way. This is wonderful, but they must all take care that the helpers do not develop a sense of ownership towards the pastor and expect him to do as they desire, or become jealous of others who are also called to be helpers.

8. Finally, never go to bed with a negative attitude towards anyone.

Keep your heart pure and in the love of God, and God will bless you more than you can possibly imagine. Any critical or resentful spirit you may have towards any of your parishioners will prevent the anointing upon your life. You must love your sheep as they are, even as Jesus loves us as we are. Yes, He even loved Judas to the end! By the grace of God, don't **ever** violate the law of love.

Remember that there is no conquest without discipline.

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