

THE FEARS OF THE MINISTER

Together For the Gospel

April 14, 2010

Intro) Watching the documentary *Comedian* with my wife...

WHAT DO THE FEARS SAY?

- "I'm not as gifted/known/followed as _____. Am I going to end up exposed as a failure?"
 - My experience with RUF Staff Training
 - Your experience during T4G?
- "You need to like and appreciate me. What will it take?"
- "They're plotting...."
 - "We Who Are Your Closest Friends," by Phillip Lopate (see back)
 - The man with the clipboard: real or ghost?

SOME FLESHLY STRATEGIES (not an exhaustive list!)

- Volume of activity (Walter Lippmann: "Whirl is king.")
 - "We offer lots of programs, so I clearly pastor a healthy church."
 - "We support lots of missionaries, so I clearly care about non-Christians."
 - "Calls, emails, texts, and meetings are incessant, so clearly I'm needed."
- Niche/"turf"
 - denomination/affiliation
 - blog/cyber-presence
 - conferences
- Play the professional
 - workaholism
 - appearance
 - credentials

In the seventies many seminaries were hard pressed financially but now had, in the D.Min., a lucrative product to sell. At the same time, many ministers were hard pressed psychologically as they sensed their growing marginalization in society, the decline of their status, and the corresponding loss of power and

influence. The shotgun marriage was consummated. ...It strains credulity to think that only a love of learning has produced this happy match. After all, among those who graduated with the degree, 78 percent said that they expected to be more respected in the community and 73 percent expected to be paid more. (David F. Wells, "The D-Min-ization of the Ministry," in *No God But God*)

- Vices

HOW GOSPEL MINISTRY SUFFERS

- "You cannot serve two masters."

Inasmuch as one's time, energy, and aspirations are absorbed by one's own neediness, those things are not directed toward the kingdom of God.

- Ministry becomes truncated.
 - "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." (1 Tim. 5:20)
 - "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." (2 Tim. 4:2)
 - "Exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you." (Titus 2:15)

* C. S. Lewis' warning about aspiring to "The Inner Ring"!

- Example overrides preaching/teaching (i.e., *ethos* drowns out *logos*).
 - "We're not saved by what we do." → "It's crucial that you see what I'm doing."
 - "Jesus Christ meets every need we have." → "I need you to affirm me."
 - "His yoke is easy, his burden is light." → "I can't take off 2 weeks in a row."
 - "God alone is to be feared." → "If I disagree with them, there will be trouble."

**One of the first assertions in Chapter 1, Section 1 of Richard Baxter's The Reformed Pastor is "See that your example contradict not your doctrine."*

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

- Remember the unadjusted gospel (especially our justification)!!

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me *it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you* or by any human court. In fact, *I do not even judge myself*. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." (1 Cor. 4:1-4)

From time to time I am tempted to try and count how many of our folk are engaged in medical, nursing, and psychiatric work; social welfare amongst babies, children,

delinquents and maladjusted adolescents; in geriatrics, health visiting, serving as Christians in Law, Civil Service, teaching, lecturing, etc.; applying their skills as Christians in the world with a witness to give and a task to do. But there are so many that I cannot count them, and I am not going to. The true statistics are kept "upstairs," where the computers and computers are quite accurate, even though they do not publish their figures down here. (William Still, *The Work of the Pastor*)

- Ask for the repentance we need.
 - Repentance unto life is *an evangelical grace*, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.
 - Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of *his particular sins, particularly*. (WCF 15.1,5).

- "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance."

- Real day off each week/fully-used vacation time.
- Proactive shepherding rather than reactive appeasement.

Instead of offering non-stop activities, [Eugene] Peterson's church had a "quiet order of worship" that sought to draw people into the gospel story. When newcomers asked what activities his church offered, he'd speak of worship on Sunday, and "if you'd let me be your pastor I'd help you learn not to want so much activity. (*World Magazine*, May 3, 2008)

- Cultivate a new mindset about being liked or disliked.

"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Gal. 1:10)

We have a base man-pleasing disposition, which will make us let men perish lest we lose their love, and let them go quietly to hell, lest we should make them angry with us for seeking their salvation: and we are ready to venture on the displeasure of God, and risk the everlasting misery of our people, rather than draw on ourselves their ill-will. This distemper must be diligently resisted. (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*)

But also remember what Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:19-23: "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. *I do it all for the sake of the gospel*, that I may share with them in its blessings."

... it is right for good rulers to desire to please men; but this in order to draw their neighbors by the sweetness of their own character to affection for the truth; not that they should long to be themselves loved, but should make affection for themselves as a sort of road by which to lead the hearts of their hearers to the love of the Creator. (Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*)

"We Who Are Your Closest Friends," Phillip Lopate

We who are
your closest friends
feel the time
has come to tell you
that every Thursday
we have been meeting,
as a group,
to devise ways
to keep you
in perpetual uncertainty
frustration
discontent and
torture
by neither loving you
as much as you want
nor cutting you adrift.
Your analyst is
in on it,
plus your boyfriend
and your ex-husband;
and we have pledged
to disappoint you
as long as you need us.
In announcing our
association
we realize we have
placed in your hands
a possible antidote
against uncertainty
indeed against ourselves.
But since our Thursday nights
have brought us
to a community
of purpose
rare in itself
with you as
the natural center,
we feel hopeful you
will continue to make unreasonable
demands for affection
if not as a consequence
of your disastrous personality
then for the good of the collective.