

LECTURE 12: MINISTERIAL ETHICS

[Suggested readings: Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, Part 3; William G. T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, Part 2, ch. 2, 4; Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Growing Minister*, ch. 7-17; Dean Merrill, *Clergy Couples in Crisis*]

The Minister's Personal Ethics

As ministers of the Word of God, pastors are in a position that requires extra diligence in the area of personal life and testimony.

Reasons for extra diligence

1) Biblical command to be an example

“Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Tim 4:12)

2) More required because more opportunity

“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” (1 Cor 4:2)

3) Satan's attacks stronger

Cf. Peter and other apostles—“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you [Greek plural] as wheat.” (Luke 22:31)

4) Minister's testimony affects the reputation of the church and of the Lord as well as his own

Cf. result of David's sin (“by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt,” 2 Sam 12:14)

Common areas of weakness or temptation

(Following the pattern of the Ten Commandments)

- 1) Finding other things more important, interesting, or desirable than God
- 2) Approaching the worship of God in a professional or routine manner
- 3) Using God's name or Word in a careless or flippant manner
- 4) Considering the Lord's day as just another work day
- 5) Neglecting the duties of a husband or father
 - Allowing children to be "spoiled" by church members
- 6) Not respecting lives or welfare of self or others
 - Allowing health to deteriorate
 - Justifying resentment and hatred toward people in the church who oppose you or your policies
 - Unsafe driving
- 7) Failing to love and honor your wife
 - Thinking lustfully about women in your congregation
 - Putting yourself in compromising or tempting situations
 - Failing to provide proper supervision for youth activities
- 8) Using church property improperly for personal use
 - Withholding the tithe or offerings
 - Wasting time that should be spent in pastoral duties
 - Being irresponsible in personal finance
- 9) Telling others what you were told in confidence

- “Ministerial exaggeration”

10) Being envious of church members who are more prosperous than you

- Being envious of pastors of larger or more successful churches

Sources of extra diligence

- 1) More regular and deeper study of Scripture
- 2) Preaching and counseling on ethical subjects
- 3) Prayer for self and others (and prayers of others for you; cf. Eph 6:19-20)
- 4) Meditation on God’s promises to bless and sustain his servants
- 5) Fellowship with other ministers (presbytery, etc.)

The Minister’s Professional Ethics

Properly understood, the application of the Ten Commandments, as mentioned in the previous section on personal ethics, will cover all aspects of professional ethics as well. Also, our courses in practical and pastoral theology will discuss these items in more detail. However, there are some areas that deserve special mention.

Conduct regarding the congregation

(1) Faithfulness and diligence in requirements of position

- Maintaining personal and family testimony (see above)
- Time “on the job”
 - Daily schedule
 - Weekly schedule
 - Annual schedule

- Keeping good relations and balance with the session, the deacons, and other church organizations
- Maintaining contact with all church members/adherents
- Maintaining detailed study and professional growth
- Maintaining integrity in preaching
 - The sin and consequences of plagiarism

(2) Being an example in all areas

- Church attendance
- Giving
- Service in church
- Testimony in the community

Conduct regarding other ministers

(1) In Presbytery and Synod

- Attendance and attention
- Responsibility, willingness to work
- Seeking the good
- No “bad-mouthing”
- Recourse to courts of church if necessary

(2) With pastors of other churches

- Do not infringe or disrupt work
- Example of Old Side-New Side controversy
- Beware of “circular letters”
- On other hand, we do have liberty in Christ to preach, write, etc.; use balance
- Encourage visits by vacationers in their churches, etc.

(3) In changing churches or ministers

- In your previous pastorate, let the new pastor be the pastor.
- Normally church disputes leading to the resignation of the pastor are not worth splitting the church; leave graciously.
 - Remember the example of Jonathan Edwards.

Maintain honor of previous pastor(s); remember, someday you will be the previous pastor!