

The Heart of a Minister

Introduction

The heart of a true minister can only be understood as seen through union into Christ. Ministers carry and bear many responsibilities. This booklet is not meant to add another burden to that pile. Each page is given to describe the attitudes of Christ as they have manifested through ministers such as Paul and will manifest through Christ's Body. Christ our Life, the Great Minister Himself, will empower, fill and enables us in all areas of caring for others as we simply remain in life-union with Him. In this sense a minister can find constant rest in God's sufficiency even as they bear the burdens of His Church daily. To look beyond external actions and into the very spirit of the thing you will find that the heart of a minister is bound up in and filled up with the Lord Himself.

I know that in myself there is the need for Christ to be more deeply formed so that His heart may come forth more purely to those I serve and love in this gospel. The sharing of this booklet is simply the things that I have been personally searching out in the scriptures. It is my prayer that these words will bring us encouragement and refreshing in the knowledge of Him. He is our Source and will perform and be all things in us and through us.

*“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us”
(1 Thes. 2:8)*

“For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thes. 2:20)

“For God is my witness how I greatly long after you all in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:8).

“But Also Our Own Souls”

If one examines Paul's writings closely they will discover that, to Paul, his ministry was more than just declaring the Gospel to people. To the Church in Thessalonica Paul writes, *“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us” (1 Thes. 2:8)*. Many would assume that imparting the Gospel of God to those they are ministering to would be more than sufficient service. Yet, it becomes apparent that to Paul it was much more than just being faithful to preach the truth, but that he also bore a deep care for the Body of Christ that came from the very bowels of the Lord Jesus. Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi that, as God was his witness, he greatly longed after them in the bowels (tender mercies) of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:8). These deep longings in Paul's heart were the direct result of being one with Jesus. Paul bore the care of the Lord for those that He had died for. His travail and labor was that the preaching would become fruitful

in the people. The object of His labor was not the ministry itself but those to whom he was sent.

“Nourishing The Body”

Paul felt a great responsibility as a minister of the Gospel. The Apostle and those he traveled with desired to present themselves in a heart condition that would be acceptable to God (I Thes. 2:4). When they came to share the gospel they did not speak to please men or use flattering words. They did not seek after making a profit for personal gain, nor did they allow the people to lift them up as special and more important to care for than others. Rather they presented themselves as *“a nurse that was cherishing her children.”* (I. Thes. 2:7). They were as gentle as a mother would be as she nursed her growing babe.

In Thessalonica, Paul likened his ministry among them to that of a mother nursing her growing child. We know that from deep within a mother carries food that will nourish her child so that it can grow and be healthy. The tenderness a mother has as she delivers the milk to her own child comes from the deep love and acceptance that is in her heart for that child. The “ministry” of feeding her child is really the natural flow of nourishment that comes forth from the shared life between the two. In Galatians Paul likens his ministry among the people to the pangs of a woman in labor travailing until Christ be formed in them. Once again, his focus is not on the delivery of a message but the bringing forth of Christ in the Body. Paul’s wording here sounds more like a mother than a minister. In other places he speaks more like a father than an instructor.

“As A Father”

Paul asked the Thessalonians to remember that the manner in which they encouraged, comforted and exhorted them was the way a father would care for his own children. Again you can see the depth of their care as described in the intimate description of a father with his children (vrs. 11). The focus was not on the Thessalonians becoming accepted into God’s family, but on the care of a father was to bringing his own into maturity. We all know that there are times when every father must chastise his sons. I believe it is because of a deep nurturing and care that a father will deal in this way, and that it is not an excuse for father’s to provoke their children to wrath, but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). If you look at John’s epistles notice that the way in which he relates to the saints is tenderly in family terms.

The scriptures declare that these ministers were among the Thessalonians night and day preaching the Gospel of God (I Thes. 2:9). This was more than a good conference, it was the manifestation of the love of God constraining these ministers to labor until all come *“in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:13). Paul told the Ephesians that the purpose behind the ministries was to help the saints mature so that the Body of Christ could be built up together into the Head in all things. He goes on to tell the Ephesians that because the Body of Christ is fitly joined together as one, it will grow as it nourishes itself in love.

“An Example To The Body”

Paul understood that as a minister to the Body of Christ he also stood as an example to them. His example was not just the words he spoke and the deeds he did, but that the spirit in which he ministered and spoke manifested the nature of the Life that he was preaching. His demonstration was not in his own strength, but through his deep weakness. He walked and ministered as one who was crucified with Christ. He had died in Christ. The life that was being demonstrated as an example before the people was Christ Himself (Gal. 2:20).

Even as a father stands as an example for his children to follow, so did Paul desire those to whom he ministered to follow the example he had left with them. To the saints in Corinth Paul wrote, *“As my beloved sons I warn you. For though you have ten thousand people who instruct you in Christ, you do not have many who father you in this Gospel; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel. Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me.”* (I Cor. 4:14-16). Paul was stating that there are many who can instruct you on the details of being in Christ, but only a few who will nurture and travail for Christ to be formed in the Church. His suggestion is for them to become followers of this Gospel not just in doctrine, but in the very spirit in which it was begotten into their hearts. Paul asks the Ephesians to be followers of God, as dear children, and to walk in love in the same way that Christ had loved them, and gave Himself to bring them forth (Eph. 5:1-2). And again to the Philippians he asks them to allow the very mind of Christ to be in them, a mind that does not just understand certain gospel truths, but a mind that has become renewed and transformed into the very Spirit of Christ (Phil. 2:1-4).

They Are His Body

To the Church in Colosse Paul wrote that he was rejoicing in his sufferings for them, that he might fill up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for the sake of the very Body of Christ which is the Church (Col. 1:24). Even the afflictions he went through were not just the hardships of being a minister, but more dearly related to the spirit of all his ministry which was the edification of the Body of Christ. Again and again you can see Paul’s viewpoint of ministering the gospel to the church went way beyond that of surface ministry relating. Paul understood the Body to be one with the Lord, and therefore he had deep love for them. The first words God spoke to Paul related to this very subject when God said, “Saul, Saul.. why are you persecuting Me.” From the beginning of his conversion, Paul understood that what he was dealing with was the very Body of Christ. Even when Jesus spoke to Peter about going into the ministry, the Lord connected the sheep with Himself. Jesus told Peter that if he loved Him, then he would feed His sheep. The Lord needed someone who would care for His family, who would nourish His Body, who would cherish His Bride in the same spirit that He loved them.

Paul shared with the Ephesians in chapter five that the Lord nourishes and cherishes the Church because they are His very own Body. This is not just a beautiful description of the way Christ relates to His church, but also an exhortation of how we ought to care for one another even as Christ. He washes her with His Word. We are to share His words

with one another in a manner meant to wash and not condemn. Before Jesus went to the Cross He gird Himself with a towel, stooped down, and washed the feet of His disciples. He said that He did this as an example of the spirit in which they were to minister. He told them that a servant is not greater than his master, and that if this is how the Son of God serves others, they too will become servants of all. He was preparing them not just for a life of ministry, but a life that would be carried in a very specific spirit. Christ would not just be God's truth to them, but Christ would be revealed as life in them. They would do all things in His Spirit and by His Life. Their ministry and their nature would be one. Every aspect of their existence would flow forth from the living waters of His life within. Paul had this same Jesus revealed in Him. Paul knew it was Christ Who was living in him, pouring out through him, and travelling within until all saints came into the maturity and fullness of the corporate and risen Son.

“Bound Up In Each other”

You can see in both Paul and John's letters that their fellowship with the churches was held in the deep bonds of oneness in Christ. John several times would stop short of finishing his letters so that he could come see them face to face that his joy would be full (II Jn.12). Paul told the Thessalonians that he was praying night and day exceedingly that he might see their faces. To these men it was more than just the task of writing edifying letters to the churches, but also the communication of the deep love and care that was in their hearts. This kind of a relationship with them would naturally result in the desire to be with them in person so that they could express their fellowship and love face to face. These minister's lives were bound together in those they were edifying, even as a Body is knit together in the oneness of sharing the same life. Because the minister is joined in Christ to those being ministered unto there is an intense care as a result. Listen to some statements that Paul makes reflecting how deeply he is identified with those to whom he ministers, “For now we live if you stand fast in the Lord.” And again “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and my crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.” The deep wells of Christ resident in these ministers was purposed not just for their own needs, but also for the nourishment of the whole. The heart of Jesus and the love of God in us will constrain us to care for one-another and to lay our lives down for each other. Therefore we will not find complete fulfillment and joy independent from the whole. The living organism of Christ's Body is undeniable bound together forever as one in Christ Himself.

The Truth In Love

“But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, Who is the head, even Christ” (Eph.4:15).

“From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph.4:16).

In the greater view of Christ's Body having the ability to edify itself in love, you can see the emphasis Paul would place upon the truth being spoken in the very spirit of love. For

an infant to receive nourishment it is not enough that food exists and that it has a need of it. Someone must administer that nourishment to that infant. There is a need not just for truth in the Church, but for those who will nourish and cherish the Church as she is washed with the Word of God. For the Body of Christ to mature there will need to be those who are willing to go beyond their ministry requirements into the very travail that is necessary for Christ to be established and formed. It is then no longer a matter of duty, but of pressing in and pouring out until Christ is revealed in His Church as Life.

Isaiah, through the Spirit of God, calls out for those who will comfort God's people, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry unto her...(Is. 40:1-2)". Isaiah also declares that there will be those who will nurse, be comforted, and mature in Zion. "*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem*" (Is. 66:13). "*That you may nurse and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory*" (Is. 66:11).

Conclusion

Jesus Himself said that unless a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies it will abide alone as a single kernel. Jesus is our example for being fruitful in our ministry. It is not the Cross we preach, but the one we bear daily that brings forth His increase. We must bear the burdens of the Body. If we do we will allow the dying of the Lord Jesus to work in us so that His life can work in others. Ultimately our mission is not just to preach the Cross, but like Jesus, to bear the Cross so that others can partake of Life. A crucified Christ must have crucified followers. Christ exemplified true leadership as He hung at Calvary pouring out the life that He desired others to receive. Our consolation is in knowing that we have partaken of that same Lamb, and His Nature in us will fill every step of our journey and fulfill every requirement necessary to nurture others.

Paul pleaded with the Ephesians to walk worthy of the vocation to which they were called. He exhorted them to carry themselves in the spirit of Christ, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, and endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3) He told Timothy, his apprentice, that "*the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing...*" (2 Tim. 2:24). Paul served the Lord by being filled with the Spirit of the Lamb, and he allowed the mind of Christ to keep him in "all humility" even in the midst of many tears, trials, and persecutions (Acts 20:19). And with his final departing words to his beloved Ephesians he said, "*Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 20 : 28).***