

Reflection on Covenant of Personal and Professional Ethics

The Professional Life of a Minister

Our EFCC covenant of personal and professional ethics addresses the “professional life” of those who serve in the EFCC. Recent writings have reminded us that “Brothers, we are not professionals! We are outcasts!” John Piper has reminded us of the fact that we are not to think or aspire to a professionalism that secularizes our role or lifts us above those we hope to serve. As I explored the meaning of professionalism, I found that it is not divorced from Piper’s call to be willing to be the outcast. The intent of professionalism is that we “are engaged in or worthy of the high standard of a profession.” (Webster’s New World Dictionary) We have three great institutions – the home, the government, and the church. Today in all three spheres standards are being compromised and forgotten and the result has been the loss of credibility, stability, and authenticity in each. We no longer trust marriages to last, government to do what is right, or leaders to have integrity. We need professionalism restored.

Peter admonishes the early church to “be on guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your steadfastness.” (II Peter 3:17) Peter implies that we need principles to keep us aright. Principles are the elementary rules we govern with, whether it be in a field of study or work, or in our personal lives and conduct. Several principles should be guiding stars as we seek to navigate the uncharted events of everyday ministry. Let me suggest a few.

First and foremost is integrity. David said, “Surely you desire integrity in the inner self.” (Psalm 51:6) Integrity is a ruthless honesty and congruence within us and in relation to the truths we proclaim and aspire to. Though we are on a stage and scrutinized by others, we should be foremost in doing it to ourselves. Since we are role models, everything counts. As someone said, “A great man cannot commit a small sin.” It is magnified by our public persona. Aubrey Maphurs says “A Christian leader must be Christian from core to crust.” Such integrity must touch my relationships with parishioners, opposite sex encounters, study and research, and past pastoral ties with churches. It is what affords us the transparency of honesty for now we have nothing shameful to hide or protect. Many things in our work will require privacy, but it is usually sin alone that demands secrecy.

Another principle is that of stewardship. Joseph was the steward of Pharaoh’s household, and he knew what was his to do and what he needed to leave alone. He also knew he always had to seek the good of Pharaoh and not his personal benefit or pleasure. We are given the stewardship of leading God’s people, but they are never our people. We give an account to the Great Shepherd, who not only has many sheep and wants none to be lost, but also has many flocks, yet all in one fold. It means that I have to avoid loss, division or sectarianism due to my personal desires. A steward submerges his will always to the one who enlisted him/her. Our decisions need to always be from the standpoint of the good of God’s people. In many ways, a steward is the ultimate “company man.”

Related to this is the principle of servanthood. It is possible to act as though we are servants as long as all goes our way, but not be a servant at heart. The test is how you feel when you are treated like a servant. Does pride raise its head then, demanding better treatment? Do we strive for title, status, fame or honor? If we desire vertical distance between the leader and followers, our egos are still in the

way. Our honor is that we get to serve the flock of Jesus Christ, as Peter said, “not under compulsion, but voluntarily,... and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness, not lording it over those allotted to your charge..” (1 Peter 5:2,3) Any church can “hire” a servant, but only a servant can volunteer a servant’s heart! People soon discern the difference.

Servanthood really helps us master the complexity of authority, power and the responsibility we bear. Authority is delegated responsibility and power is the resources to deliver. When our egos get in the way, congregations are reluctant to provide us with the power to fulfill responsibility. When they learn we truly have a servant’s heart, they are usually willing to increase both our power and our authority, since they know that we will use it for the common good rather than self-interest. Are we ego-driven or responsibility motivated? Is it for God or is it for me? Those are key evaluation questions.

Finally, in any profession its members are always mindful that their calling is to a unified life. A doctor is always a doctor, whether he is at the clinic or hospital, or watching hockey at the local rink. A medical crisis in the bleachers springs him into action just as if he were wearing his lab coat and stethoscope. So a minister is always a minister. Our life is one that comes from within rather than the clothes we wear or the location we are in. There is never a time we are not a minister! It is a life lived out rather than a cloak put on and discarded! When we live it well, we bring honor to our profession but most of all to the One who called us to it.

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