

SO YOU ARE A MINISTER OF GOD?

Today's Text: Lev., Chapters 21-22; 1 Tim. 3: 1-13

Extracts:

1. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, ... They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God...” [Lev. 21: 1, 6]
2. “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach... Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to too much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience” [1 Tim.3: 2, 8-9]

In a recent issue of a local (Trinidad & Tobago) daily newspaper, a distressed reader wrote a letter to the editor to “report” the pastor of her church to the general public. Her mother, an adherent of a Christian denomination lay dying in the hospital. Before her illness a few years ago, she was an active member of the church. She paid her tithes and vows promptly. She served on several committees. In fact, her pastor always commended her work and dedication to the congregation. Now that her mother needed the support of the pastor and the church, all her efforts had been thwarted. She had been unable to get the pastor to come and pray for her mother. She had been unable to even get an appointment to speak to him directly. That was why she had now taken the matter to the court of public opinion.

On the surface, that may look like an extreme example. However, it is not too far-fetched. In many churches today, the priests (or ministers of God) [Is. 61: 6] are feeding on their flocks instead of feeding them. Those who are not “greedy of filthy lucre” [1 Tim. 3: 8] are having immoral relations with church workers or members, male and/or female. Some have become too big to minister to their flock, delegating that responsibility instead to junior or inexperienced ministers.

*As we study the word of God, especially in **Leviticus, Chapters 21-22** and elsewhere, we find that God considers priesthood so important that He has had to lay down specific requirements for their recruitment and conduct. As we examine them in today's lesson, we should also examine ourselves, whether we are the kind of ministers that God would be proud of, or those He has called “profane” in whose house [church] “I have found their wickedness” [Jer. 23: 11].*

1. Who is a minister of God?

In civil society, a minister [or secretary] of state is a very important person, especially in a developing country. The minister is a high-profile person who has a large team of advisers and aides *ministering to* his/her needs. However, the word, “minister,” means the one who attends to others! He or she is supposed to serve others, not to be served. Jesus underlined this principle to His disciples when He told them:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve...I am among you as he that serveth [Lk 22: 25-26, 27b]

Jesus went on later to wash His disciples’ feet and said, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you*” [Jn 13:14-15].

A minister of God, therefore, is a person in a *spiritual leadership position*, a priest [no matter how officially designated] whose duty is *primarily to minister to God* and next to attend to the needs of his/her congregation. Moses told the children of Israel: “And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; *for them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto Him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried*” [Deut. 21:5]. It is only by realizing their role as servants of God that ministers of God can successfully serve their congregations.

In the Old Testament, God specifically chose the tribe of Levi as the lineage for the *priests* “for the Lord thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons *for ever*” [Deut. 18:5]. The first priests that were anointed in a public ceremony were Aaron and his sons, Nadab and Abihu [Lev. 8: 1-13; Lev.10: 1]

In **Leviticus 21-22**, God impresses on us the importance He places on the priesthood. Holiness is the buzzword. The priest, for example:

- ✓ Is a “chief man among his people” who must not profane himself by participating in burial rituals, even for his parents [Lev. 21:1-5, 11]
- ✓ Must not marry a whore or a divorcee [v.7]
- ✓ Must be anointed with oil before he can wear the priestly robes [v.10]
- ✓ Must not defile the sanctuary of God because God’s anointing is on him [v.12]
- ✓ Must not have any type of blemish, physical or spiritual [vv. 16-21]

Under the Law of Moses, the priest's duties included the following:

- ✓ Church work, such as maintaining the sanctuary [Num. 3:38], and keeping the lamp burning continually [Ex. 27:20-21]
- ✓ Worship duties, such as burning incense [Ex. 30:7-8], offering sacrifices [Lev. 1: 1-17], and blessing the people [Num. 6: 23-27]
- ✓ Pastoral duties, such as purifying the unclean [Lev. 15:15-31], diagnosing leprosy [Lev. 13:2-59], and carrying the Ark of the Covenant [Josh. 3: 6-17]
- ✓ Evangelism, such as teaching the Law [Lev. 10:11]

2. The minister of God under the New Covenant

In the New Testament, Peter addressed all *believers* [i.e., true followers of Christ] as “a royal priesthood” [1 Pet. 2:9]. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, the lineage of kings [royalty]. That is why He is the Lion of Judah [Rev. 5:5], who came in human form to take the throne of His father, David [Lk 1:32]. Jesus is also “a priest *for ever* of the order of Melchisedec” [Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7: 1-28]. You will recall that Melchisedech was the King of Salem [i.e., King of Peace] to whom Abraham paid tithe [Gen. 14:18]. Melchisedech was “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but [was] made like unto the Son of God; [and he] abideth a priest continually” [Heb. 7:3]. Consequently, his priesthood was superior to that of Aaron [who was in Abraham's loins at the time that he paid tithe to Melchisedech!] [Heb. 7:4-7].

So, by offering His own blood once and for all times, Jesus has obtained for us eternal redemption, and become the High Priest [Heb. 9:11-12]. Under this dispensation, the “Gentiles have been made partakers of their (Jewish) spiritual things, [and] their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things” [Rom. 15:27]. So, Jesus “hath made us kings and *priests unto God and His Father*” [Rev. 1:6]. Under the unction of the Holy Spirit, most of the priestly duties can now be shared among *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers* [Eph. 4:11]. Therefore, we all are now priests, preferably called ministers of God.

Even those outside of the church are not exempted. God places people in different offices for His purpose, even when they do not know Him [Is. 10: 5-12]. For example, the state authority exercises the power to punish evil and reward good and promote good governance, thereby ministering to the needs of the citizens. That is why Paul has admonished us to be subject to the state authority, which “is the *minister of God to thee* for good” [Rom. 13:4]. Therefore, politicians and other public office holders are ministers of God who are expected to use their positions to serve God and their people.

Esther was the queen of the Persian King Ahasuerus. When her people, the children of Israel then in exile in Babylon, were threatened with total destruction

through the wicked plans of their enemy, Haman, it was Esther's influence with the king, through her faith in God, that saved her people [**Esth. Chaps. 4-8**]. In like manner, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus used their influence in civil society and the Sanhedrin respectively to secure the release of Jesus' body from the Roman authorities for burial [**Jn 19: 38-42**].

From the foregoing, we can identify three groups of ministers of God, as follows:

a) *Full-time priests*

These are ordained ministers who give up all their other earthly pursuits to become fully involved in the ministry. Peter and the other disciples gave up their respective professions [e.g., fishing, tax collection, etc] to become full-time church workers [**Acts 6:2**]. Paul gave up what would have been a lucrative legal practice to become a missionary to the Gentiles [**Acts 22:3; Acts 5:34**]. Amos gave up farming to become a full-time prophet [**Amos 7:14-15**].

b) *Moonlighters*

Some people combine full-time ministry with their professional jobs or interests. This may be necessary especially at the early stages of that ministry [when it cannot yet pay its bills] or when the minister needs extra money for his family's needs or to maintain independence. Paul always told his listeners, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, *that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me* [**Acts 20:33-34**]. Paul practised his trade as a tentmaker everywhere he went for pastoral work. For example, in Corinth, he stayed with Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, "because he was of the same craft...and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers" [**Acts 18: 1-3**].

c) *Volunteers*

These are not priests, *per se*, but they have received a special dispensation to play priestly roles. In the Catholic Church, for example, reverend brothers and sisters assist the priests to administer the Holy Communion. In some churches, honorary evangelists can preach and lead prayers but are not authorized to administer Holy Communion, except where there are no full-time evangelists. In most gospel churches, there are different cells made up of members of the congregation that specialize in intercessory prayers, counseling, bible teaching, etc.

In the early church, the Apostles appointed seven deacons, including Stephen and Philip, to assist them with administration [**Acts 6: 1-8**]. Later, we saw Stephen preach a powerful sermon for which he was martyred [**Acts 7:1-60**], and it was Philip who converted and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch [**Acts 8:26-40**].

3. The importance of good fruits

The modern church has been rocked by one form of scandal or another. For example, ministers of God are profaning their calling through sexual immorality, fraudulent practices, and user-friendly interpretation of the word of God. Although these are not new, since the Bible has good examples of them, the tempo has increased.

For the avoidance of doubt, let us restate the qualities that God expects His ministers to have. These are well summarized in **1 Tim.3: 1-13** and **Titus 1:5-9**. Here are very important ones:

a) *Family life*

Since the family is the beginning of church, a person who aspires to be a minister of God must have a proper marriage [to a previously unmarried or widowed woman] and run a home where love and the fear of the Lord reign supreme [**Eph. 5:18-33; 6: 1-4; 1 Pet. 3: 1-12**]. Those who have chosen to remain unmarried, which choice is also acceptable to God [**Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:32**], should keep their vessels pure because their bodies are the temples of the living God [**1 Cor. 6:12-20**].

b) *Adequate preparation*

Although we are made ministers according to the “the grace of God given unto [us] by the effectual working of His power” [**Eph. 3:7**], we still need adequate preparation before we can successfully take on our ministerial responsibilities “lest being lifted up with pride, [we might] fall into the condemnation of the devil” [**1 Tim. 3: 6**]. We need training in self-discipline, managerial, administrative and human skills. We need to have a deeper knowledge of the word of God, preferably but not necessarily through a Bible college. Elijah mentored Elisha on the job. So, we should be prepared to be mentored by those whose bodies carry the scars of trials, tribulations and triumphs.

c) *Good conduct*

Are we “sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous”? [**1 Tim. 3:2-3**]. Are we “just, holy, temperate,” “not selfwilled, not soon angry”? [**Titus 1:7,8**].

Does our conduct invite or repel others? It is only when we can say, “yes” to each of those questions that we can proudly come forward!

4. Conclusion

Peter has admonished:

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever, Amen [1 Pet. 4:11]

Have you been called as an apostle or a prophet, a teacher or a miracle worker? Do you have the gifts of healings, helps, service [governments] or diversities of tongues? [1 Cor. 12:28] Can you glorify God with songs and music? [Ps. 150] If you have answered “yes” to *any* of those questions, you are a *potential* minister of God! But, it does not end there. If your purpose is to satisfy your worldly desires, you are taking a big risk, and “be sure your sin will find you out” [Num. 32: 23]. However, if your motive is to glorify God and edify the Church, go forward boldly, by Christ Jesus, to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God *continually*, ... and to do good [and give to the poor] for with such sacrifices, God is pleased” [Heb. 13:15, 16].

May your ministry be richly blessed in Jesus’ name.