

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SPIRITUAL (PART II)

Galatians 6:6

Persons who share responsibilities on a church staff have many interesting experiences in life and meet many interesting people. I met one such unforgettable character during my ministry in Fort Worth. The man was not a Christian, but his wife was a member of the church. The man had some very deep-seated hostilities toward the church which came out when he became intoxicated, and this was most of the time. His calls to the church or to my house would come rather regularly.

His calls would usually go something like this. "Is this the pastor of the North Fort Worth Baptist Church?" "Yes, this is he." I would reply. "Have you been working hard today, pastor." "Well, I have had a rather busy day, I would answer." "How much money did you get off of the poor widows of the church today?" "Sir, I am not aware that I took any money from the poor widows of the church today." Then he would really open up, "Why don't you blanketyblank preachers get a job and work like everyone else. Why do you want to be a parasite on everyone. I just want you to know that you are not going to get one cent of my money, and my wife is not going to give one cent to you." I would usually try to reply to him kindly, not wanting to provoke him any more, but reason was out of the question. He would usually end with a volley of curses directed in my direction and would slam the phone down if I did not beat him to it.

The first call or two that I got from this man disturbed me greatly, but after a while I became accustomed to them, and brushed them off and went on. This man had no reason to understand the nature of my work, nor to be sympathetic or supportive to what I was seeking to do. However it has really hurt me when I have found faithful members of the congregation who have held to similar views. They never express theirs with the force that this benign soul used, but they express the same feelings.

I have seated with me on the platform tonight the ministers that God has led to the fellowship of First Baptist Church. Each of these men embodies a different aspect of ministry in this church, but together we make up a whole ministry team. Each of them came to be a part of this staff with an experience that is much like mine. My being here began more than twenty-five years ago with a special call from the Lord to give my life to a ministry of the word. As a high school senior I was searching for the will of God for my life. I had a strong inclination personally to pursue studies in law, but God began to cloud that over. I began to sense in my heart a desire to be a minister of the Word of God. The desire grew into a compulsion so that on a Sunday morning in the fall of 1953 at the Northside Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Tennessee I made a public

commitment to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That was the beginning of the pilgrimage that led me to here. Just a few months later I was called to my first church to be the pastor, and just before my nineteenth birthday I was ordained to the Gospel ministry. Each of these men could share with you a story that would have some similarities. We did not choose to be laborers within the church, but we were chosen by the Lord of the church.

Does this place us in some superior position within the church? Never! Such a call is not a sign of superiority for indeed in His wisdom God often calls the weaker that he might show His strength through them. This may be why He has chosen us. But it does mean that we are more responsible in the life of the church. God has placed upon us special responsibilities relating to you. We are ultimately accountable to Him for these responsibilities.

Our text tonight brings before us the responsibility the church has toward its ministers. Paul includes it in this list of responsibilities of the spiritual. Could it be that there were some in the fellowship who felt no need of these God called and church acknowledged teachers of the word? This is a specific reference to those who have been set apart for a full-time teaching ministry in the fellowship of the church. In the church at Galatia there may have been only one such teacher of the things of God, but in other congregations there were more than one.

The basic responsibility is summed up in the word "communicate". "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." The word translated communicate can be translated share or have fellowship with, or be a partner. The word has in it the root idea of a partnership, a fellowship, a sharing. The New Testament word "fellowship" comes from the word. The relationship then between the workers and the congregations is to be that of a true fellowship. The workers are to be sharing with the congregation the things that they have and the congregation will reciprocate and share with the workers the things that they have. God has placed some special things in the lives of these men that they might share them with you, but he has some special things in your lives to share with them. What are these things that you can share with your ministers?

I. THE SPIRITUAL ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHARING FINANCIALLY.

This is the primary thrust of this admonition. It is an admonition for the believers who benefit from the ministry of the Word to have fellowship with the ministers of the Word financially. From the very beginning of the Christian faith, the pastor-teachers of the congregation were supported by the members of the congregation. The tithes and offerings that were brought to worship on the first day of the week had this as a primary purpose. The minister gives to the church his time, energy in exercising the spiritual gifts the Lord has given to Him, and

the church makes it possible by supporting him so that he can meet the physical needs of his family.

Through the years I have been reluctant to speak on this theme. I have been sensitive to those critics who say that the preachers only interest is money. It hurts me to have someone confuse what is a very sacred thing to me with unholy motivations. My experience has been that the churches I have served have been generous with me. They have been faithful to meet my needs. And this is as it should be. But churches do not always do this. Sometimes they will use money as a means to express displeasure with the ministry of the man of God. And my observation is that they have a tendency to overlook the financial needs of the other ministers on the staff. If these men are the servants of God, and have been placed in this fellowship by the Lord of the church, and are devoting their time and energies to the task assigned to them by the church, then they too have a right to look to this church to be faithful with its part of the fellowship.

The paragraph that follows applies here. If we sow to the spirit, we will reap life everlasting. The sowing and reaping is relating to our providing financially for the men that God places among us to serve. The church that supports its ministers adequately and faithfully will reap the benefits a hundred fold in their service of the men. Is it not tragic that some are willing to be liberal with everyone and everything except the work of the Lord? They will give their children five dollars to go to the movie, and fifty cents for Sunday School. They want to be what a friend of mine in Fort Worth calls, Free-loaders. They want the blessings and benefits of the church without any of the responsibility. The spiritual have responsibility to support financially those God has made to be their teachers.

II. THE SPIRITUAL ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHARING SPIRITUALLY.

You can pay your staff a good salary, and still come short. Since we are in a situation now where there is a beautiful harmony between the staff and the people of God, let me urge some things upon you. The support needed is broader.

The spiritual support that the ministers need includes affirmation. They need that acceptance that gives one a sense of security and well-being. All of us need this. What does this include? It includes a sense of gratitude on the part of the people of God for service rendered. It includes a willingness to listen and give consideration when new ideas are presented. So often the staff is forced to work in an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion. If a man is a true servant of God and His church, in his heart he wants only that which is best for the fellowship of the church. He is not infallible --- and knows this. He will be willing to listen to those who want to discuss his ideas and disagrees with them. But he needs something better than an attack upon his person and his position as the servant of Jesus Christ. It grieves my spirit to find men who have spent their lifetimes in the work of the Lord in his church coming to the end of their ministry with so many

scars and wounds. They are rarely ever scarred from the world, but they have been wounded in the house of their friends. The people they have tried to serve have rejected them. So affirmation does not include a blind fellowship, but it does include an affirming acceptance.

The spiritual support that the ministers need includes prayer. They are so vulnerable in the spiritual battles. When an enemy army attacks, it will always focus special attention upon the ranking officer. So it is with Satan. The one person whose fall would do the most to hurt the work of the Lord in Texarkana is the one speaking to you right now. Being your pastor puts me in such a position that the enemy would like nothing more than to topple me. If he can mislead and deceive me, he has effectively touched the total ministry of this church. The same is true for the co-workers who sit here with me. Paul sensed this. This prompted his many appeals for prayer. Early in my ministry I closed most of my letters with an appeal for prayer, but it was not really a sincere appeal. I still follow the same practice, but there is a new urgency in it now. O how we need the support that you can give us through your prayers.

The spiritual support that the minister needs includes patience. Even the ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are human. They can fail, and often do. If you expect of them perfection, you put them into such a position that you will destroy them. They need from you an understanding patience with their shortcomings. Do not be harder on them in your judgments than you are on yourself. They are not perfect parents. They are not perfect husbands. They do not have perfect wives. They do forget things that they promise. They may lose their cool. But with your patient encouragement they will become more than you can imagine through the power of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

What can a church expect in return if it is a faithful partner in the ministry of the world? They should be able to expect an exemplary walk by the servant that they are supporting, and true manifestation of a servant spirit. They can surely expect from God the kind of blessings that He alone can give. If they find themselves with a man who does not manifest the true servant spirit, God has a way of taking care of his own. The church should be careful that it not seek to usurp the authority of God with reference to His servant. He has a way of moving them when they need to be moved, and of purging and correcting them when they need it. Especially when the church is surrounding them with the kind of support that God has commanded.