

The King's Highway

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PRINCIPLES OF MINISTERIAL DIGNITY

Although dignity is an intangible characteristic, it is nevertheless a most essential quality to a successful career as a minister. In the performance of his ministerial tasks the careful minister who is a credit to his calling will observe rules and methods of practice becoming the dignity of his work.

He must look upon each task, no matter how large or small, whether glamorous and in the spotlight, or unlovely and without recognition or praise, as a sacred privilege of service rendered to "him who loved us and gave himself for us."

The manner in which a minister discharges his tasks and responsibilities also reveals the degree of his dignity. Efficiency in his work depends in no small measure upon the orderly, organized, systematic method in which it is approached and discharged. There is dignity in orderly procedure, and the lack of it will mean a mediocre and fruitless ministry.

Good records will reveal both the strength and weakness of the work he is doing, and will enable him to know how to set his sights. An organized method and a systematic endeavor will achieve these aims, and will do so in less time and with less strain. To slide through a day or a week without methodical purpose is to be most undignified, and indicates that the minister has no true appreciation of the high calling which is his.

Punctuality is one of the jewels of good character, and contributes much to the dignity of the ministerial calling. Some pastors are late in almost everything they do, and the net result is an unsuccessful ministry. The minister who is accomplishing anything worth while is dependable and punctual in the discharge of his responsibilities.

He is prompt in his correspondence, thorough in his work, and considerate of the time, feelings and needs of others. Whatever the task or responsibility involved in the work of the ministry, it is worthy of our best. A proper conception of the dignity of the work will inspire a man to give it his best thought, energy, and workmanship.

Ministerial dignity is further evidenced by his parsonage standards. The parsonage tells a silent but vivid story. His home should be comparable to the homes of the community he is endeavouring to serve. It must be clean inside and out and well maintained. It should be occupied by a respectable, well-disciplined Christian family which commands the respect and admiration of both church and community. In almost every way the dignity of the minister is reflected in the place where he and his family reside.

Added to the things already noted, the minister's pulpit decorum testifies to his dignity or lack of it. The moment he approaches and enters his pulpit, the eyes of his congregation are upon him and his movements. It is therefore very possible for him to engage in various types of trifling procedure which will surely militate against the sermon he expects to preach and the good he expects to accomplish.

Dignity in the minister's decorum does not mean strained, sanctimonious, stiff, or starchy mannerisms. It does not mean that he must stand like a rigid wooden stick without expression. Any affected mannerism, whatever it may be, spoils his dignity.

He should enter the pulpit with a holy anointing on his heart and the radiance of Christ's love in his countenance. In such an attitude he will possess the supreme essential to ministerial dignity. He must be aware of the holy task before him, and this awareness will be reflected in his physical deportment.

He must be humble but not affectedly so, free but not light or frivolous. He must constantly remember that he is conducting a holy service of worship. Nothing will more quickly quench the Spirit, ruin an atmosphere of worship, and disgust the worshippers than an indulgence in lightness.

The platform is not the place to comb the hair, manicure the nails, adjust the tie, recline in the pulpit chair, visit with a brother minister, select the morning hymns, leaf through a book, or pay a visit to the pianist while someone is leading in prayer.

True ministerial dignity demands that the service be well planned and well in mind. A capable presiding minister will not jolt his congregation over a rough road in a lumber wagon, nor make them hold their breath while he drives like Jehu. He will be careful to possess a poise that will give his people confidence. He will have an objective in mind, and his people will be assured that he knows the direction in which he is going.

It is no mark of spirituality to blunder into the most important service of the church and hope that the Spirit will take control of the entire program. The service should be planned in every detail, and yet be flexible enough to permit the Holy Spirit to rearrange it if He so desires.

There is dignity in the proper use of music. Such songs as "Brighten the Corner Where You Are," "Let a Little Sunshine In," and "Give Me Oil in My Lamp" may be fine in their place, but their place is not the morning worship service. There is a wealth of inspiration for worship in the singing of the old hymns of the church, such as "Amazing Grace," "Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned," and "He Dies, the Friend of Sinners Dies." Such hymns are appreciated the more they are sung. There is something soul-lifting about both the words and music.

If the minister is fortunate to have a capable pianist who plays a prelude as the worship hour opens, he should be reverent and courteous enough to wait until she has finished before he rises to preside. He who handles his service efficiently will never open by saying, "Now let's all get a book and turn to Number 47 and raise the roof!" After all, the supreme purpose of the worship service is not to raise the roof but to raise the soul in adoration, worship and praise to God.

In our desire to avoid formalism, there is a danger that we swing to the other extreme and become irrever-

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