

What Do We Need to be Ministers?

From the Gospel-Luke vi. 36ff.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. **37** Judge not, and ye shall not be judged : condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned : forgive , and ye shall be forgiven : **38** Give , and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down , and shaken together , and running over , shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again . **39** And he spake a parable unto them *, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? **40** The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. **41** And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? **42** Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

I have chosen today to apply these very significant words of our Lord in the Gospel to the matter of Christian ministry. They certainly also pertain to interpersonal relationships, which is perhaps their more common usage. But I think we are all interested in knowing how each God-given encounter in life can yield enduring fruit for God and His Kingdom. We are tempted to forget that ministry —service to others whose simultaneous and ultimate purpose is service to God— is the province of all of us. And in this very hour to which we have been called, when *the harvest* may indeed become *great, but the labourers few* (Matt. 9:37), there is a pressing need for all of us to be properly schooled in ministry.

Among those appropriate attitudes that Jesus enjoins us to adopt are a refusal to *judge* and to *condemn*. These are negatives, of course, but are components of ministry nonetheless. Every human situation requires a decision as to how one reacts to it. And it is the Christian's refusal to judge and to condemn that constitute a portion of his service to others.

Does a refusal to judge mean a suspension of standards? This is the manner in which this particular verse is so commonly employed today, swung around like a machete ready to cut down anyone whose opinion differs from that which is deemed acceptable by contemporary standards. But this cannot be, because Jesus Himself judges very decisively and without apology regarding both His enemies and even His disciples. To the one: *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?* (Matt. 23:33), and to the other: *he turned , and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men* (Matt. 16:23). Standards must be kept, and the only ones that rise above the debatable to the universal are those established in God's Word.

But, to put it succinctly, when it comes to relating to others, we are not Jesus. His heart was absent the beclouding effect of ulterior motives, or pride, or scorn, or that "superiority complex" with which we are all endowed. It is our reflexive tendency to rush to judgment, to instantaneously attempt to pin down and label the motives of others. In fact, we do so often with a fan-

tastic inability to see within ourselves the very same things we attribute to others. We *judge*, we jump to conclusions, and refuse to first carefully test that impulse via the Christian standard of charitable empathy.

Now clearly there are many wickednesses which are immediately identifiable as such, “mortal sins” if you will, violations of that natural law which is universally inscribed upon the consciences of men (see for example Romans 1:18-32), as well as flying utterly in the face of God’s commandments. But ministry includes an understanding that the motivating disease of sin in these and in every other case is something shared by all of us, for we are *all sinners* (Ro. 3:23). Coming to terms with this state of things should instill within the Christian humility, caution, a hesitation to rush to judgment, and a tender solicitude. It is also the key to possessing a heart full of love, a love which always needs to be *given* to others, the consequence of which will be love returned in *good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over*.

Moving ahead in our text, it should be clear that no one can minister unless they can see where they are going: *Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?* Think of it: here is the guide, presuming to lead others to higher ground —to truth, to virtue, to a better way— and instead merrily shepherding them off the road into the misery of a painful fall, where all of them collapse together! But the self-appointed leader was just as blind as those he had proposed to enlighten, and should never have undertaken the role of a guide in the first place. Jesus moves ahead to explain precisely what it is that had blinded him: there is a *beam* (think “rafter” or “joist”) in his eye! This is a startling picture indeed.

Imagine a group of eye surgeons, all who have been assigned to patients who are enduring the misery of *motes* (think, “a fragment or splinter of some sort”) in their eyes. The malady of these poor souls is indeed real, and the process of extraction is one requiring skill and appropriate equipment and training. But these surgeons are attempting to perform the operation completely blinded by obstructions they are too proud to admit to, and thus are not even aware of. The result of their work will be far worse than the illness they were supposed to have addressed.

Thou hypocrite, cries our Lord, *cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye*. Jesus does not in any way diminish the importance of the need to remove *the motes* from the eyes of those who cannot do it themselves. Those fragments are aggravating, and irritating, and can themselves lead to infection and perhaps blindness. But if the presumed surgeon counts himself far too high, too righteous and perfect, and so much better than his presumed patient, he is useless for the task, and both he and the sufferer will continue on in their illnesses.

Now, let’s try to move all of this into the present. The world is filled with people suffering from eye disease, if you will, awaiting someone with the qualifications to help them out. In this

case it won't be eight years of medical school plus residency plus five more years of specialized surgical training. It will be people filled with Christian compassion, an enormous degree of godly patience, of person-to-person skills born out of a lifetime of God-given concern for others, of the stamina to look past the awful, riveting symptoms of spiritual illness with which our nation is afflicted toward the only cure, which is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The decisions that our country is in the very process of making and of which we all are aware are the consequence of its deep seated sickness. The Church is the only, *only* school of doctors that are equipped to meet the need. Once again, the illness is spiritual, as is the cure. Often, when one is really sick, the last place one wants to go is to the physician's office. It's the needles, the regimen, the medications. Have you noticed how the atmosphere, the ambience, of a medical office can have a lot to do with how desirable it is to be there?

But many would rather be sick, they would rather die, than receive treatment. Clearly, when it comes to spiritual afflictions, there are also those sufferers who want nothing to do with a cure. They do not even recognize that they are in need, let alone see any reason to be healed. Such, it would seem, border on the classification of hopeless. But even in such cases, we are required for their sake call upon the God for whom alone *nothing is impossible* (Matt. 19:26).

We might be inclined to believe that qualifications for ministry today would be of a different order than those we have been observing here. With open hostility to the faith being expressed, and the very powers of government themselves being drawn into collusion with agendas that we recognize with a mixture of grief and anger are destroying not only their proponents but everything else with them, we feel in need of desperate measures. The changes in laws represent a collective change of heart that this country has undergone. This, in turn, is the consequence of decisions that individual Americans have made either through default, by indifference and ignorance, or actively, through accepting and embracing evil that is wickedly represented as good.

But ministry involves an ability to rise above the rush of emotions that swirl within us at each new turn of events, and to behold the state of things through the cool, calm, and clear eyes of Christian love. Who do I see? The *blind*, in need of leading. My *brother*, whose sight is compromised. Those caught in the grip of sin, who don't need to be *judged*, nor to be *condemned*, but to be *forgiven*. These are priceless graces that can only be dispensed by God's people, especially in times like these.

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. "Perfect" here doesn't mean faultless, spotless, without sin, as we understand our Lord Jesus to be. No, it simply means "sound, complete, equipped".

We are disciples. Let us be as our Master.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.