

# Ministerial Forum

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In comparison to other Bibles, it must be said that The New American Standard Bible is a very good and usable Bible. It is very faithful to the original languages and is less doctrinally biased than many versions found in the book stores. In my opinion, the New American Standard Bible is one of the best versions available for anyone who is interested in serious Bible study. Every Christian should have one as part of his or her library. Ω

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## MINISTERS RELATING TO MINISTERS

By Ray L. Straub

*(Taken from a message given to the 1976 Ministerial Council in Glorieta, New Mexico)*

Wisdom has strange characteristics! It eludes those who feel they have it while the wisdom of the modest is often extant and expanding.

Our first opportunities to attend Ministerial Council found us wishing the older brethren deliberating on important decisions had our profound insight! Ask a Council newcomer what he thinks of it, and he is likely to observe that few speakers really say much. Of course, were he to offer commentary, he would be among the select!

The aging process tones down the suppressed brilliance. The more Councils we attend, the more our wisdom resembles that of the other members. The equalizing process progresses. Maturing has a way of changing values. Instead of the need to demonstrate a high-powered intellect, it becomes more worthwhile to accept the good words of Paul to the Romans, chapter 12:9, 10; "Do not let your love be a pretense, but sincerely prefer good to evil. Love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other" (Jerusalem Bible).

The way ministers of any church treat each other has a lot to say about the effectiveness of their work. The leaders may be well-trained, experienced, and have an excellent setting in which to expect results. All of these benefits can be nullified by faulty attitudes.

One of the most obvious goals of the ministry is to dwell in unity. Does this suggest complete doctrinal accord? Certainly the cardinal teachings of the Church offer basis for togetherness. They rally our support.

What is truth? Truth is what is. It's an accurate description of reality. The original and ultimate Source of truth is God. This means that truth has an infinite character. We can always learn more. We can never grasp all of it. This means that as a body of ministers we are in constant pursuit of truth. This is a far different endeavor than being convinced you have all truth, leaving only the challenge to persuade others.

Pursuit of truth is based on an important postulate: God is ultimate righteousness and ultimate justice. These infinities forever lie beyond the complete grasp of the finite human mind. The presumption that a religious body has all of the truth is a feeble attempt to equate themselves with God. We can have no part of that!

It follows that our reference to truth means we are building upon well-founded ideas of what seems to be. Sincerity and prayer will allow us to drift closer and closer to understanding what is. It's a path leading to a goal. We are all at differing stations on this path. That's good. It means we can help each other and learn from each other.

It can also be cause for dangers expressed in two extremes. We can be too dogmatic. The church at Ephesus was guilty of this. She could not bear "them which are evil." She tried those who claimed to be apostles and found them to be liars. That was good.

In the meantime, she lost her "first love." The character of this church is apparent. She was overly dogmatic. Conformity to her theology was rigidly enforced. She was not charitable, and she needed to repent.

A contrasting danger is that we can become too pragmatic. The church at Thyatira demonstrated charity, service, faith, patience and works. These humane virtues are not mentioned in the description of the congregation at Ephesus. Where the Ephesians failed, Thyatira was alert.

What was Thyatira's problem? She allowed "that woman Jezebel . . . to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." The excellent discipline of Ephesus was missing at Thyatira. We can be too dogmatic or too pragmatic. Acceptable service is temperately between the two extremes.

The plan of the International Ministerial Congress is to progress in study and understanding truth. We can only succeed if we help each other. This can be done by confining difference of opinion on important issues to discussion among the ministers. It means there must be respect for another's viewpoint. On the path to truth, we cannot be absolutely sure another is not ahead of us. There is no way we can expect respect if we cannot give it.

Unity is not absolute accord on doctrine. We've been together often to discuss doctrine, but our most obvious displays of unity come on completely different occasions. At the Friday evening banquet, slides were shown of some of the devastation from the earthquake in Central America. The brethren from there spoke of their trials and thanked God that lives were spared. We wept and rejoiced that they were alive, worshipping and thanking. We joined together in praise! That was unity.

Ministers must show mutual consideration. We stand as equals. As an overseer I found that ministers are generally wise, possess excellent understanding of the situation they are in, and they are most often correct in their judgment. It's a mistake for one minister to quickly accept the accusations of the laity against another minister. It's also a mistake to quickly accept one minister's criticism against another.

A new pastor competes with the memory of the former pastor. The worst of the present is often compared to the best of the past. To keep the ego bolstered, the successor is tempted to fault his predecessor. Time seems to have a way of vindicating the minister in a high percentage of cases. Let's be slow to find fault with each other, because the next preacher is often right!

We must be sensitive to competition. How delicious it seems when lay members wisely point out the faults of their pastor, compliment our superior qualities, and ask us to anoint and pray for, baptize, marry and bury (not necessarily in that order or involving the same person). We tell ourselves that such discriminating laity should have the best (meaning us)! Too often this "best" has been bad.

As difficult as it seems, those who love us can and will learn to love other ministers as well. We should promote this. Others are as worthy as we are.

Nothing threatens unity more than changes. They'll come. Some will be good; others ill-advised. It's understandable that as long as we feel strongly about a program or belief, we'll express ourselves. We have that right. However, there is a point at which we may exercise a "right" and simultaneously do what's wrong.

Our ability to accept and cooperate with change reflects directly upon our individual and collective ministry. It is possible to tax the patience of the brethren and frustrate progress because of our personal involvement. Obviously, these are matters of judgment. The point at which "firmness" spills over into "stubbornness" is one of discretion and deserves attention.

Let our love be genuine. Recently, I was attacked by an unusually vicious case of the stomach flu. I called Dad to come pray for me. He and mother responded quickly, prayed and offered me comfort. They had often shown their love to me. I expected a demonstration of it was available upon call. Later, my son came into the room to see how I was getting along. As I groaned and expressed my severe discomfort, he gently placed a sympathetic hand on my back, and using his knowledge of anatomy and physiology, explained what was going wrong in my pain-wracked body. It was an expression of love from an unexpected source. Parental love is always there. It's what we give our children, without expecting any in return. Is our love that of a parent — generous, genuine, glowing? Or, are we often taking the role of the child, expecting to be loved and feeling that's what love is for — to receive it.

Walking up to the dining hall at Ministerial Council, one passed a bed of brilliant flowers. They were thickly planted and pompously reflected bright yellows and oranges among the healthy greens. One night a hard frost came. In a few hours, the proud and glorious blooms were fading. The green leaves and stems turned a charcoal gray, and the flower bed reeked with the smell of death. What a change that frosty night brought!

Love can be like that if it is not carefully guarded. A chill can spoil it. May our respect and love for each other be forever healthy, brilliant and glorious!

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The following bulletin is an example of an order of service used by one local church for the Lord's Supper. It is reprinted here to stimulate your own ideas as you prepare for your own congregation's observance of the upcoming service.

LORD'S SUPPER SERVICE  
Church of God (Seventh Day)



Father...  
forgive them

"When I See the Blood" 448  
"Glory to His Name" 57  
Invocation  
"Why Should He Love Me So?" 319  
"EXAMINING OURSELVES" Pastor

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Footwashing Ordinance of Humility

Reading John 13:4-17  
Processional: "Let the Beauty of Jesus" 471  
Footwashing Ceremony

(Please reassemble in the sanctuary after the footwashing ceremony.)

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Partaking of the Emblems

Responsive Reading Isaiah 53:1-6  
The Lord's Body: I Corinthians 11:23-24  
Prayer of Thanksgiving  
The Lord's Blood: I Corinthians 11:25-26  
Prayer of Thanksgiving  
Hallel Psalms of Praise: Psalm 117  
Psalm 118:21-29  
Benediction Hymn: "I'll Live For Him" 367

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