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An Effective Minister, Part 4

D. Michael Martin said, “*Ad hominem* arguments are common in the course of human debate. Although they usually are unfair, they also frequently are persuasive.” (Martin, 1995, p. 74)

What is an *ad hominem* argument? *Ad hominem* is Latin for “to the man.” By criticizing the messenger, which is what *ad hominem* essentially is, *attacking the man*, the critic endeavors to cast doubt upon the message. This type of attack is often used when folks are arguing for the truth. It goes something like this:

Did you know that person advocating the deity of Christ robbed a bank and killed one of

the security guards? From this we conclude: Christ is NOT be God!

Or this argument:

You know that guy who spent the last 20 years talking about the importance of honesty in business- how he attributed his multi-million dollar success to always telling the truth? It turns out that all his money was made from an illegal drug business. Truth in business? Obviously it is not important!"

The conclusion do not follow from the premise. They promote the idea of guilt by association. However, oftentimes these arguments seem to be pretty persuasive. And yet, *ad hominem* arguments are almost always wrong; yet because they are so persuasive, they truly are frequently made. Dr. John MacArthur wrote:

Enemies of the truth often try to destroy ministers of the gospel by persecution. But when that does not work, as it did not with Paul, they try to undermine people's trust in the spiritual leader's message or his personal integrity. (MacArthur, 2002, p. 36)

That is exactly what Paul's critics did in Thessalonica and this is what Paul was up against when he wrote this epistle. After Paul was chased out of the city, his critics turned their focus on those Christians that remained. These critics not only attacked them personally (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15), but they set out to attack Paul's character! They compared him to one of the many charlatans of the day who went from city to city seeking to make a profit off the ignorance of the populace. Ancient literature has much to say by way of warning against these people!

Knowing this, Paul turned his focus in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 to describing what he was as a servant of Christ. First and foremost we have learned that the essence of Paul's ministry (and so the focus of all Kingdom Ministry) was NOT on personal gain, BUT in building up the Thessalonians in the word- establishing them in Christ (2:12)! These things enabled Paul to prove faithful to his calling:

- A Divinely Wrought Boldness, v. 2- he ministered knowing the greatness of God!
- A Passion to Please God, vv. 3, 4b- he loved the Lord and so sought to honor Him in all things.
- Tempered by God, v. 4a- Paul understood that the more he served the Lord, the more he would be tried by God. Fidelity in ones service in the Kingdom and trial go hand-in-hand!
- Servant of the Body of Christ, v. 5- once and again, ministry is NOT about what we get out of it, BUT what we give: Christ and Him Crucified!

This brings us to another characteristic of an effective minister: He does not claim his

rights, v.6.

1 Thessalonians 2:5-6, “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed- God is witness- nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we¹ might have asserted our authority [lit., our weight]”

This almost seems like a contradiction. The Bible is quite clear: we are NOT to be about seeking the praises of men.

John 5:44, “[We did not] seek glory from men.”

Unlike the many charlatans of his day, Paul was NOT in the ministry for personal gain or approval. Ultimately he didn’t care what people thought about him! That is NOT and must NEVER BE the focus of a minister of Christ.

3 John 9, “...Diotrephes, who loves to be first...”

John tells us that this is NOT a good thing! As a leader in Christ’s church, Diotrephes had authority. His problem was that he loved the authority more than he loved the Lord and His people. We also see this in Christ’s criticism of the Pharisees of His day.

Matthew 23:5-7, “...they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi.”

Clearly the Scriptures teach that we ought NOT to care what people think about us! What is most important is what God thinks about us! And Paul beautifully reflects that here! And yet let’s slow down a second, what is Paul doing in this passage? He is defending himself against the false accusations that the Jews were raising about him!

Now, I thought as a minister, Paul didn’t care what people thought about him?

Well, Paul didn’t care. But he did care what people thought about Christ’s servants, lest the name of Christ be dishonored. Think of it this way: The fifth commandment teaches us, “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12). The word for “honor” is the same word used in Scripture for honoring God. Accordingly we understand that while the individual may not be worthy of it, nevertheless *the office* is; and so we endeavor to honor our fathers and mothers even though some are not that honorable.

This truth is also taught to us when it comes to civil authorities.

Romans 13:1-2a, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities [realize, Paul wrote this when the Caesars were terrorizing the land- yet he understood that...]. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God..."

With this we understand that an office-bearer in Christ's church is worthy of honor! In fact the bible says that the one who preaches the word of God is worthy of "double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17). And that continues to be the focus of Paul's concern here in Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2:6, "...nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others..."

The "glory" is NOT the vain-glory of popularity or stardom. RATHER, it is the legitimate honor that accompanies every position of authority; that is "the authority"/weight Paul could have "asserted." See, when Paul came to Thessalonica, he came as a formally called "Apostle of the Lord," sent out by God to minister in His name! As such, God's people ought to have honored him! Yet get this, at no time was Paul seeking honor!

The irony is that the false-teachers of Paul's day, the charlatans, did not hold a position of authority, BUT they claimed they did because they wanted the praises of men! In contrast, Paul did hold a position of authority, BUT clearly and again was NOT after the honor that accompanied it. So while Paul as an apostle/elder in Christ's Church held a position that rightly was to be honored amongst God's people; nevertheless, he did NOT claim the honor, NOR did he want the honor!

As Christians, you must see that you too have a position of honor/authority. Read the "one another" passages in the Bible- there are at least 18 of them (e.g., "love one another," "serve one another," etc). It is tempting to take these verses in light of ourselves and claim the prerogative of being loved, served, cared for, etc.

In this context let me ask you these questions:

- Will you live to claim your prerogatives/rights?
- Will you come here as a consumer and so wait around for people to initiate conversation... fellowship... and genuine care?
- Will you judge gatherings and people based on how well they meet your needs?
- Will you reject people because they reject you?

Christian, a mark of a healthy minister (much less an effective one) is that they do not claim their rights! Instead, they focus on the ministry to which they have been called. They are givers... not takers! We see it throughout Scripture.

Philippians 2:5-8, "Have this attitude [lit., "this mind"] in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [IOW, He did not cling to His divine prerogatives], but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

The term "humbled Himself" is ταπεινώω (*tapeinoō*) is used in the Bible of the bottom class (Luke 1:52), "men of low estate" (Romans 12:16), poor or poverty stricken individuals (James 1:9). It speaks of abject poverty, of being in the lowest position imaginable.

Though it was Christ's right as God to enjoy the prerogatives of deity (like worship, being served, living in a palace), nevertheless our Lord gave these up that WE, the sinner, might gain! It is this "mind-set" that is commanded of all Christians, "Have this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (v. 5)! Thus Christ exhorted us this way:

Luke 9:23-24, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

The imagery of "taking up a cross" in Christ's day was that of a death march! Condemned criminals were required to carry the cross beam of their execution to the place of their punishment. The fact that Christ evokes such imagery in the context of Christianity tells us the essence of our religion: it is *daily* going on a spiritual death march to self, BUT THEN following after God and so the ministry to which He calls us, which is the ministry NOT of claiming ones rights, BUT of serving others! Paul further exhorts us:

Romans 15:1-2, "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor [To what end?] for his good, to his edification."

No matter who you are in the body of Christ, you have an obligation to live NOT to your own gain or benefit, BUT to the gain/benefit of others in the body- to live unto their edification and growth in grace.

This is the Biblical standard and expectation of every healthy child of God²: They keep their focus off of themselves. They do not claim their rights, but have and hold a genuine concern for each other which ushers itself forth into action. That is the makings of an effective minister!³

Six, the effective minister is meek.

1 Thessalonians 2:7a, “But we proved to be gentle among you...”

The word for “gentle” is NOT the typical word in the Bible for meekness (πραῦς [*praus*]). However the idea behind this word conveys the same idea. The word is ἤπιος (*ēpios*)⁴ which primarily references kindness encompassing a host of other virtues like acceptance, respect, compassion, tolerance of imperfections, patience, tenderheartedness, and loyalty. “Gentleness” as used here denotes all of these and more. It is holding a porcelain flower in one’s hand- delicate and fragile- yet having such control/gentleness that no damage is done to it whatsoever. The noun is translated as “sweet reasonableness” and in fact is used as a synonym of “meekness” in 2 Corinthians 10:1. It is holding a newborn babe in ones arms- helpless, defenseless, totally and completely dependent upon others for everything. And yet not disturbing it, but nurturing it unto its growth. That’s the metaphor used here.

1 Thessalonians 2:7: “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.”

In order to give you a more modern view of the term, picture a 20,000 watt amplifier (that’s huge). If played at its loudest setting, you literally could shake and possibly break glass. So why would any want a sound device so powerful? Well, played at a low setting, the sound has a crispness which is incomparable! This is the idea behind gentleness/meekness... the ability to destroy a world, and yet complete control it at the sub-atomic level.

We see the beauty of this in ministry when we think of Christ’s dealing with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Prior to His encounter with the woman, Christ interacted with a “teacher of the law”- Nicodemus (John 3). With this, the Lord demonstrated His wisdom and sovereignty in shutting up this arrogant man, totally crushing his wayward will, thereby leading him to a saving relationship with the Lord (cf. John 7:50; 19:39). But now we are in John 4 and Christ is talking to a uneducated, culturally “foolish” woman who was living in unconfessed sin. And what did He do? He handled her with a gentleness and kindness which likewise brought her to a saving relationship with the Lord (John 4:39-42). Truly in the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 42:3a, “A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish...”

This was Paul amidst the Thessalonians! Paul clearly was a brilliant man who could have talked circles around God’s people there. Furthermore he was an Apostle, one sent by God Himself! Accordingly he had the authority to bark orders, yet that which stood out about him to the Thessalonians was his tender-hearted care and so his love.

1 Thessalonians 2:8a, “Having thus a fond affection for you...”

Another essential element to effective ministry is meekness! Christian, is that what sticks

out to others when they interact with you? Are you “gentle” and so kind-hearted, loving, and caring? If you are to have an effective ministry it must be!

Proverbs 15:1-2, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly.”

If we are about building people up in Christ, then you must see meekness/gentleness is essential!

You say, “*That’s one of my problems... I’m not very meek!*” Well, how do we cultivate gentleness in ministry? James gave the answer:

James 3:13, “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

Clearly as we grow in our maturity in Christ, we gain “wisdom” which in turn leads to “gentleness”! Accordingly, if you want to cultivate gentleness in ministry, you must grow in wisdom! Yet as this is broad, let me give you a couple of areas on which to focus.

First cultivate a biblical priority so that you might understand the importance of gentleness.

Matthew 9:13, “But go and learn what *this* means, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

How important is worship in the Bible?

- It is that for which you were made, Isaiah 43:6b-7!
- It is that for which you were saved, John 4:23-24!
- It is a synonym of the believer, Philippians. 3:3!
- More than anything else, it will determine the course of your life, Psalm 115:4, 8!

God says that “compassion is more important than worship” tells us NOT that worship no longer is important, BUT that compassion/grace/gentleness is! Do you understand therefore what ought to be one of your highest priorities? Along with worshipping Christ acceptably, it must be growing in your ability to be gracious, compassionate, kind, tender-hearted, and patient... essentially growing in meekness!

Secondly, cultivate a biblical passion to set your heart to work on loving the body of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8a, “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. Having **THUS** a fond affection for you...”

The heart of all gentleness is love. If you don't love the person you are ministering to, gentleness will be forced. You say, *"That's my problem! I don't love the people to whom I have been called! I don't love my neighbor! I don't love God's people!"* To which I say, "Welcome to the club!" That we are commanded to love (John 13:24; 15:12; Romans 12:10), tells us that love will NOT be the natural thing. Accordingly, with this we begin with a simple prayer, "God, give me a love for your people!" And then we actively endeavor to cultivate this love in our lives

1 Peter 1:22, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.

This passage is rich! It speaks of a people who were working on loving the body of Christ. From this we conclude:

- Love was NOT the natural thing for them to do, and
- Nevertheless they actively endeavored to cultivate it!

If you want to be gentle in your ministry, set your heart to cultivate love for the body!

Thirdly, cultivate a biblical perspective, which includes two things: Remember the debt of forgiveness and come to know the power of gentleness in ministry.

Leviticus 19 teaches us about the debt of forgiveness.

Leviticus 19:34, "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

When you and I consider the redemption that God provided for His people AND THEN read that God's people were arrogant and unloving toward strangers, WE RIGHTLY ARE SHOCKED! God forgave them so much and yet they looked with hostility toward the lost? Unthinkable!

Recall the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35). A regional tax collector found himself in great debt to his boss- a debt he could NOT pay. The boss forgave him the entire debt and what did he do? The first person he saw who owed him money he threw in debtor's prison!! We read this and say, *"How cruel!"* And yet that is what we do when we do not forgive others!

Paul also describes the debt of forgiveness in Colossians 3.

Colossians 3:12-13, “And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and *forgiving each other*, whoever has a complaint against anyone; *just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*”

Notice how Paul rooted gentleness to the grace we have received in Christ by which we have been forgiven! Forgiven people are gentle people! Accordingly harshness in ministry testifies to an arrogant heart which has forgotten the grace of God!

Psalm 18 teaches us to know the power of gentleness in ministry.

Psalm 18:35, “Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, and Thy right hand upholds me; and Thy gentleness makes me great.

There is no question that David would attribute his salvation to the grace of Christ (cf. Romans 4:6-8). Yet he also attributed all success in life and ministry to God’s gentleness! Accordingly, to be the face and affection of Christ on this point (cf. Isaiah 40:11) is to arm our people with the glorious power that comes from forgiveness! Do you see it? Gentleness can make a man great! Harshness almost always crushes or incites anger!

So if we are going to be an effective minister, we must:

- Have a Divinely Wrought Boldness, v. 2.
- Have a Passion to Please God, vv. 3, 4b.
- Be Tempered by God, v. 4a.
- View Ourselves as Called Servants of the Body of Christ, v. 5.
- NOT claim our Rights, v. 6.
- Labor and Strive to be Meek/Gentle, v. 7.

Imagine if this characterized your parent... your spouse... your best friend... YOU!

Bibliography

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End Note(s)

¹ MacArthur observed, “In the strictest sense, the plural apostles was likely intended to link Paul (as one who had seen the risen Christ and been personally commissioned by Him) to the Twelve so as to identify his unique authority. In a less specific sense, it could designate Silas and Timothy as apostles of the churches, chosen not directly by Christ but by the churches (cf. Romans 16:7; Philippians. 2:25).” (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, MNTC, p. 42)

² e.g., Galatians 6:1-2.

³ You say, “But I have nothing to offer!” Good try! Listen to 2 Cor. 2:16. After describing the gospel ministry, Paul asks the rhetorical question, “And who is adequate for these things?” The answer... “NO ONE!” At our very best all of us are nothing more than “clay pots”- earthen ware- that have been entrusted with the gospel (2 Cor. 4:7). That means (1) we are horrible sinners, wretches in our own right, unworthy to untie the sandals of Christ, and (2) our worthiness therefore to minister in the kingdom of God comes NOT from a spiritual superiority, BUT from Christ. Second Cor. 3:4-6a says, “And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant...” This means if you have been saved by grace and are living in reliance upon Christ (cf. Galatians 6:1-2), you NOT only are qualified, BUT required to oversee, care for, exhort, rebuke, love, and encourage the people of this body!

⁴ There is a textual variant here that is hotly debated. Paul either wrote *ēpioi* (“gentle”) or *nēpioi* (“infants”). In Paul’s day Greek texts were written without any spaces between the individual words. Thus the variant could have resulted either from the accidental doubling of the nu at the end of *egenēthēmen* (thus changing *egenēthēmen ēpioi* to *egenēthēmen nēpioi*) or the accidental omission of a nu (thus changing *egenēthēmen nēpioi* to *egenēthēmen ēpioi*). The textually preferred reading is *nēpioi* (“infants”), however most scholars for a variety of reasons have suggested the former.

Truly, it is hard to think of Paul comparing himself to a baby and a nurse in the same sentence; that *nēpios* has the thought of being undeveloped and unripe and, when Paul uses it, it generally has some implication of blame; that *ēpios* occurs in the New Testament elsewhere only once (2 Timothy 2:24), and there is always a tendency for less usual forms to be assimilated to the more usual. These reasons and many more are given to explain why “gentle” is the preferred reading.