

I Magnify My Ministry (Part 2)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Last time we began a consideration of the Apostle Paul's statement in Romans 11:13: "I magnify my ministry." We're thinking of some practical implications and applications of these words of Paul, which fall in the midst of his extended treatment of God's future plan for the people and nation of Israel.

We previously pondered our need to manifest sobriety in our ministries, and also to model consistency in all that we do in our service to the Lord.

Thirdly, I believe that our text calls us to increasing levels of proficiency. For me personally, this convicts me of the need to become better equipped "to give a defense to everyone who asks" (1 Pet. 3:15).

I am continually amazed at all that people expect me, as a church ministries representative of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, to know! Their questions often leave me astounded—sometimes humbled, but usually stretched and challenged.

On some occasions, I have to ask myself if the question is one for which I should realistically expect myself to know the answer. Sometimes people will ask me, for instance, about someone with whom I am unfamiliar who worked for The Friends of Israel several decades ago. More often, people will ask me about current events and developments in Israel—assuming I have some kind of inside knowledge. Fortunately, I can refer them to the many resources that are available from The Friends of Israel, providing news and analysis from the Middle East. Then I have to explain that I am also a fellow lifelong learner when it comes to Israeli politics.

But more often than not, these questions—sometimes asked publicly—motivate me in my need to "grow in ... knowledge" (2 Pet. 3:18). Here are some of the most important areas in which I must become more proficient: the Scriptures; theology, especially dispensationalism and eschatology; Biblical languages, especially Hebrew; Jewish history, culture and religion; and the worldwide outreach of The Friends of Israel.

Finally, I must hone my craft in this position, in which I interact on a regular basis with pastors and people from a sizable geographical area who, while in basic theological agreement, hold to a variety of traditions, opinions and preferences of which I must be mindful. I must seek to become a better speaker and writer; better on my feet with regard to questions and answers; a better exhibitor at conferences; better in dealing with people in general; and the list goes on.

I think that finally as ministers we must be increasing our productivity in tangible—as opposed to theoretical—ways.

This is a difficult thing for ministers to evaluate. I know that it can be especially tricky for local church pastors to measure their progress, particularly in smaller churches.

In my particular role there are many more details to assess, and The Friends of Israel holds me accountable to file a ministry report following each month—reducing the previous month’s activities to a quantifiable record of my activities. We also conduct annual planning and review sessions.

I do not want to get to the point where I mistake quantity for quality, or pursue ministry opportunities simply to pad statistics. I refuse to wade into any area in which I do not feel competent to speak (see James 3:1), and I will always attempt to be thoroughly prepared before approaching the pulpit or lectern.

But, on the other hand, we must never fall into the trap of thinking that, since ministry is hard to measure, it does not really matter how much we accomplish. We cannot allow the spiritual nature of our work to serve as an excuse for laziness or lack of progress.

I view any Sunday without a ministry engagement—unless there is a plan or reason to take that Sunday off—as a lost opportunity. Given the choice, I would rather speak three times than two, or two times than one. Writing this column—promoted as weekly—is another means by which I can measure my progress and hold myself accountable. Paul commands us:

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. (Col. 3:23)

In fact, many people give sacrificially so that I can carry out this ministry. It is humbling to remember that they could be directing those funds toward any other cause in the world—but have instead made the decision to support me. The least that I can give them in return is my gratitude ... and my very best effort.

And, by the way, the same could be said for almost any Christian worker—whether or not they are specifically involved in a support-raising ministry.

“I magnify my ministry”—not because I am worthy, but because Christ is worthy; not because “I have already attained ... the goal” (Phil. 3:12, 14), but because I aspire to do so. As Paul exhorted Archippus:

Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it. (Col. 4:17)

May God give each of us the grace and strength to magnify our ministries.

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