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Luther's Return to Wittenberg in 1522.

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The cause of the Reformation entered a most critical stage when Luther was temporarily removed from public activity. The new movement had not been subdued at Worms, as the party of the 'Romanists at the Diet had passionately hoped. Luther's unyielding attitude towards the one claim that was, and ever will be, essential to the Roman position — the claim of papal absolutism — had for months before April 18, 1521, baffled his cunning and powerful adversaries, and his heroic address on that day in the Diet had blasted the last hope of optimists that an amicable understanding between Luther and the papists could be reached. Then Luther, after ten days of fruitless deliberation and palavering at Worms, went into voluntary exile, deferring to the counsel of his friends. Wittenberg was momentarily without its great teacher and the reformatory movement without its guiding spirit.

Soon a state of affairs developed at the metropolis of the new faith that boded the ruin of Luther's cause. The wise and affectionate friends at Worms had succeeded in saving the Reformer's person, but they seemed unable to save the Reformer's principles, from destruction. During Luther's absence at the Wartburg, Wittenberg and the surrounding country became a seething caldron of religious fanaticism. Radicalism was being substituted for an orderly reform of the Church. To remove from simple laymen the snare of idolatry, it was thought proper to remove and smash the images of saints. To abolish the blasphemy of the Roman Mass, the Sacrament was being desecrated. Monastic vows, chiefly the vow of celibacy, were thrown to the rubbish, and men and women left the cloisters to marry. The minds of men were becoming unsettled on fundamental religious matters; unrest pervaded the civic

Apostolic Comfort for the Despised Preacher.

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By way of encouraging him in his holy office, Paul wrote Timothy, his son in the faith and fellow-servant as a minister of Jesus Christ: "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." 1 Tim. 1, 12. In the city of Ephesus, one of the strongholds of ancient heathenism, the great Apostle to the Gentiles had established a Christian congregation, in charge of which he left Timothy when he himself was obliged to leave the city. Young as he was in years, and lacking as he was in experience, Timothy's position as pastor of that infant congregation in that heathen metropolis was by no means an easy one, beset as it was with trials and dangers, with all manner of problems and difficulties. Realizing this, the great apostle, shortly after his departure, wrote his son in the faith two letters, in which he gave him some necessary instruction regarding his work as pastor of that congregation and the problems with which he had to grapple, and in this connection wrote the words which have been quoted. The evident purpose of these words was to cheer and comfort Timothy in his arduous duties. This statement of the apostle regarding the manner in which he himself viewed the holy office, with its reference to the source of the ability and fidelity required for its discharge, was designed to dispel from the mind of Timothy any thought of regret for having assumed so difficult and responsible a position, and to encourage him to labor on, notwithstanding the opposition which he must meet and the difficulties he must overcome. "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." These words contain

3) Transl. by Preserved Smith, Ph. D., in *Luther's Correspondence, etc.*, II, 115.

a word of comfort and cheer for every son in the faith of the great apostle, for every minister of Jesus Christ.

This statement, for one thing, records Paul's conception of the office of the Christian ministry. He conceived it as a high honor which Christ had bestowed upon him in that He had called him to preach "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which had been committed to his trust," an honor so great that he wrote with a feeling of the most profound gratitude: "I thank Christ Jesus for putting me into the ministry." The full force of this statement becomes evident as we bear in mind, on the one hand, what Paul's station in life was prior to his conversion and his call to the apostleship, and as we reflect, on the other, upon the indescribable sufferings and hardships which he was called upon to endure as a minister of Jesus Christ.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was a Pharisee, a member of that strict religious sect among the Jews to which no man could belong unless he was learned and in fairly well-to-do circumstances. He was at that time a young man of more than ordinary ability and education, having received his training at the feet of the great Gamaliel, one of the renowned teachers of that day; and on account of his ability and education and his connection with that sect, which was known for its learning, culture, and piety, his future was bright with promise. The highest positions in the Jewish synagog and Jewish nation were open to him. By following the call into the ministry, he forfeited every hope of attaining greatness among his people. Rather, he incurred their displeasure and ill will, and exposed himself to a life of toil and shame, of persecution and martyrdom. He was now reaching the close of his career. Had he made a mistake in renouncing Pharisaism and embracing the despised religion of the despised Nazarene? Had he made a mistake in exchanging the high hopes of promotion once before him, and the high honors that once awaited him for the shame and suffering and persecution which had been his lot as a minister of Jesus Christ? Was his heart filled with vain regrets because of the choice he had made? Here is his answer: "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, for putting me into the ministry." So far was he from complaining because he had entered the ministry that he fervently thanked Christ for putting him into the ministry. Honor? Why, the highest honor that can come to a man had come to him. Any honors that he might have gained as a Pharisee he was more than ready to forego for the high honor which Christ

Jesus had conferred upon him in putting him into the ministry; nor did all that he was made to suffer in the ministry change his sentiment in the slightest. And whenever, moreover, he reflected upon the matchless mercy which had been shown him, just him, in that he, who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, had been called to preach the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, the high honor which Christ Jesus had bestowed upon him loomed larger and larger before him.

There is no higher office than the office of the Christian ministry, and no higher honor, therefore, can come to a man than when he is put into the ministry. In this same epistle the apostle says of the Christian ministry: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," an excellent work — an excellent work because, like none other, it aims directly at the glory of God and the chief good of man. The various names and titles which the Scriptures apply to the incumbents of the holy office and their office declare the fact of the excellency of this office and the high honor that goes with it. "Ambassadors of Christ" Christian ministers are called, "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God," "laborers together with God," "shepherds and pastors," and the office itself is called "the ministry of the Word," "the ministry of reconciliation," terms which are not only descriptive of the office, but expressive also of the high honor attaching to it. There is no other office like that of the Christian ministry. What is every other object which men may seek to accomplish, laudable as it may be in itself, compared with that of the ministry of reconciliation? Did not Jesus say that the gain of the world cannot compensate for the loss of one soul, and does not the Christian minister, therefore, who saves souls accomplish a greater work than the man who gains the world? Did not Jesus say that there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, and is there any other work in which men are engaged that so thrills heaven as the work of the Christian minister who preaches the Word by which men are brought to repentance? There is no greater work beneath the stars than the work of the Christian minister, none fraught with more blessed results for time and eternity. The world may not so esteem the holy office; its children may speak of it in terms of derision and ridicule; they may express their pity for the poor preacher; the office may be what it was in Paul's day, a synonymn for poverty and want; and yet, in spite of all that men may say against it,

it is the highest, noblest office to which a mortal man may aspire, as it is also the most necessary: it is a work so great and glorious that an angel of heaven might almost envy the man whom God calls into the ministry.

How Paul conceived of the ministry is evident, furthermore, from the fact that he thanked Christ, his Lord, because He put him into the ministry. Paul had not put himself into the holy office. It was not the result of his choice, his preference, that he became a minister of Jesus Christ; it was rather the result of the choice and call of his Lord, who put him into the ministry, who, at the time of His remarkable appearance, said to him: "I have appeared to thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Obedient to the heavenly vision, Paul entered the ministry, and this, no doubt, was a thought that encouraged him again and again throughout his entire ministerial career and sustained him amid all his hardships and sufferings, that it was Christ, his Lord, who had put him into the ministry. Shall not the same thought cheer and comfort every one whom Christ has called into His holy service?

Not only for putting him into the ministry, however, did Paul thank Christ Jesus, our Lord; he thanked Him also for endowing him with the ability and fidelity which the proper administration of the duties of his holy office required. The office of the Christian ministry requires no mean ability. No man realizes this more keenly than the conscientious Christian minister, as no man is more conscious than he of his lack of ability and his unfitness and unworthiness of the holy office. The gifts of body and mind, of heart and soul which the work requires are many and varied. To preach the Word, and nothing but the Word, in season and out of season, rightly to expound the Word of Truth, rightly to divide the Word of Truth, rightly to apply the Word of Truth under all conditions and on all occasions, to speak the proper words of warning and admonition to the erring and the straying, to speak the proper words of consolation to the suffering and afflicted, to discharge the many duties of a pastor to every member of the flock committed to his trust—all this requires no small measure of sanctified wisdom and ability. The office of the Christian ministry, moreover, demands fidelity, which is its chief requirement, for "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." There is no infidelity worse than infidelity in the holy stewardship of the

mysteries of God. The Christian minister must be faithful to Christ and His cause. He must be faithful in preaching the Word committed to his trust. He must be faithful in declaring the whole counsel of God without fear or favor. Doing so, he may run counter to the prejudices of his hearers and incur their ill will. Occasions may arise when he is inclined to temporize and compromise because it is the easier way. Yet at all times he must be faithful. No matter what the situation, this is the chief requirement of his ministry, that he be found faithful.

In the grateful statement of the great apostle before us he expresses his thanks to Christ, our Lord, because He endowed him with the ability and the fidelity which the administration of his holy office required. Weak as he was for the great work to which His Lord had called him, great as were the requirements of his sacred office, difficult as were the situations in which he often found himself, this had been his experience throughout his ministry, that he always received the necessary ability and fidelity from on high, so that he could exult: "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." What Christ, our Lord, did for His greatest minister He stands ready to do for the least of His apostles. "Such trust have we through Christ to God-ward; not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." Weak as we are, His grace is sufficient for us, for His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Let the Christian minister do his work with his eyes lifted up unto the hills from which cometh our help, and as his days, so shall his strength be. Especially to those who preach the glorious Gospel of the blessed God applies the Master's promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Cheer up, fellow-servant, with the great Paul in the holy office! Think of the high honor which Christ, our Lord, has bestowed also upon you in putting you into the ministry. In your hours of gloom and depression let this thought humble you, and let it lift you up again, that it is Christ, your Lord, your Savior, who has called you into His holy service, and that, weak though you are for meeting the requirements of your exalted office, His grace is yet sufficient for you.

Go, labor on, 'tis not for naught;
 Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain.
 Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;
 The Master praises — what are men?