

# I Magnify My Ministry (Part 1)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

In Romans 11:13, the Apostle Paul inserts a short but pointed phrase which has the power both to convict and to inspire. He wrote simply: "I magnify my ministry."

It seems that such a personal and dynamic statement may be better understood when it is exemplified than when it is explicated. But it has captured my imagination, and I thought that I would share a few thoughts on the subject—for my own sake, as well as those who read them.

In the context, Paul is talking about amplifying and projecting his ministry "to the Gentiles" (v. 13) in order to "provoke to jealousy" (v. 14) the Jewish people—in the sense of stirring their interest in the gospel of their very own Messiah. In essence, he wants his "countrymen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3) to be motivated to ask, almost defensively, "Why are you Gentiles talking about such things which, by nature, belong to us as God's chosen people?" This, he hoped, would drive them toward the message of salvation in Christ alone.

Still, I find myself fascinated by this phrase. What did Paul specifically do to enhance and advance his ministry in this way, and what can we learn from him? How can we apply this concept to our spheres of service?

I do not claim that my thoughts here are exhaustive or conclusive—I only hope that they are encouraging, enlightening and instructive.

We can magnify our ministries, first of all, by our evidence of sobriety—of "sober-minded" (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 2:6) thinking. Indeed, Paul exhorts all Christians "to think soberly" (Rom. 12:3) about their lives. Who should give greater concern to such sober thinking than the minister of the gospel?

My impression, then, is that there should not be any doctor, lawyer, business owner or politician who is more serious about his work than I am about mine as a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. After all, the results of his specific labors are temporal; the results of mine are eternal. Yet, we both trade in the things of time. The efficiency with which I make use of this fleeting time and the limited resources at my disposal ought to outpace anyone who is operating purely for worldly gain.

But sobriety is not only to be found hidden within our attitudes. It should also emanate out into the areas of our lives that are public and visible. My "manner of life" (2 Tim. 3:10) ought to be such that people might think it appropriate to ask me questions of eternal importance, or to inquire of me concerning other grave and weighty matters.

What we are really discussing here is leading by example—doing those things that it is incumbent upon oneself to do.

For one thing, I want to look like a leader—certainly when I am acting in any official capacity. I will concede that I do not wear a dark suit and tie everywhere I go, like some of the preachers of yesteryear. However, I definitely want my appearance to complement my message, and never to distract from it, within the context of a given local church culture. I'm not a college kid, and am absolutely not a shock jock, a fashion model or a trendsetter. So, unless there is a reason or a request to do otherwise, I will wear a coat and tie to speak on Sunday morning.

We also magnify our ministries when we conduct them with consistency—in an orderly fashion. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40), Paul told the Corinthian congregation. That verse—and that principle—were drilled into me from my earliest days in my Lutheran upbringing. How much more needful they are for me today!

In my ministry with The Friends of Israel, I work independently on a daily basis, and the task before me is enormous—indeed, one which could never be completed. My view of the work can quickly become diffused, and my attempts to manage it can quickly descend into chaos once I am inconsistent in my approach to them.

I must be proactive—careful to remain on course and on schedule. Sometimes it is necessary to rethink priorities, but I must do so in a way that will maximize efficiency, rather than simply eliminating difficulties. Missing deadlines, lowering expectations and delivering less than promised are all too easy to do, but are certainly not the means to magnifying one's ministry.

Losing track of emails, dropping phone messages or falling behind on correspondence are small blunders that can build up huge deficits in a hurry.

Few things feel as good as sending out a letter—or a whole mailing—right on time, or finishing an article when it is due. And nothing will ever replace a handwritten note.

Some of these things are painfully convicting to me even as I write them. Truly, it is “not that I have already attained” (Phil. 3:12). But that only serves to reinforce their importance.

I will conclude these thoughts next time by focusing on our need to develop increasing proficiency and greater productivity in the quest to magnify our ministries.

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