



Transcriptions

Professional is a Good Word

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Annotation: *Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO, April 28, 1988.* Ted Ward discusses excellence and competency for ministers from a biblical perspective.



Now today we're going to add a third lecture, Professional is a Good Word, and tomorrow we will round out the series with a lecture, Educating for Ministry. [Also in this series, Education and the Great Commission and Getting Serious About Christian Education—see Audio Archives.]

Professional is a Good Word. I want to speak today to issues of quality and substance, address the issue of excellence, and talk about competency. And I'm speaking to people in ministry, whether the ministry of the pulpit or the ministry of the educational arm of the church which I do not see all that distinctly the one from the other. I see them merging and interrelating. And, let's face it, in most of our churches that do not have specialized ministers of education, the pastor is *de facto* the minister of education anyway so it doesn't do us a whole lot of good to talk about religious education simply as if we were addressing the churches that have multiple staffs. So we're going to address this as a ministry issue and make a few side remarks as it relates particularly to the religious education majors and some of the careers that are other than or auxiliary to the central ministry of the Word. I'd like to read an extended passage of Scripture as we begin today and you will find this in the last portion of the letter to the church in Galatia. Galatians 5 and into 6. I'm going to begin at 5:16 and read into chapter 6 [transliteration from New International Version]:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

A life plan, a series of criteria; some propositions about what quality is, where excellence is. Given to all of God's people but clearly essential for those who will minister. It becomes very easy for us to read passages like this, even as children, and somehow to titter at certain points especially when the negatives are passed through and we say, well, you know, that's not talking about me. And then sometime within the next 5, 10, 15 years find yourself in exactly those spots and wondering how you got there. I think sometimes the problem is that we take for granted that, because we belong to Christ, that we really don't need to concern ourselves with the decisions in the moral realm. They will, more or less, take care of themselves because, after all, we know the truth of Christ. We belong to him. We really don't need to concern ourselves. I think Paul believed that Christians need to think about these things. I think Paul believed that he, himself, had to deal with these matters. And when he talks about drunkenness and orgies, you say, well, now, wait a minute. Paul certainly can't be thinking of himself. Whoever he was thinking about there must have been among the brothers and the sisters in the faith. Whether himself or whether others in the communities of faith that are prone to falling to the side, he is speaking to Christians. He is speaking to you and me today reminding us that our standards are a matter of concern, and that excellence in ministry can be lost through the carelessness and the failure to observe the warnings of Scripture and the failure to avail ourselves of the work of the Spirit in our lives that enables us to be overcomers.

I want to talk with you about this issue of quality in the backdrop of that Scripture. We talk today so much about excellence. It is a virtual watchword in our society. There have many books written about excellence. Gardner has virtually made a fortune writing books about excellence. Excellence is very, very obviously good and anyone who is against excellence is obviously some kind of an evil character. I'm suspicious of excellence which, of course, raises one more question about me. Because I find that, in our society, quite often excellence is perceived largely by the popular mind as a matter of individual achievement. Therefore, we strive for various symbolic excellences

such as grades and honors and all the rest of that within the academic establishment and similar things within society, in general, which simply do a kind of one-ups-man-ship on each other. I'm more excellent than you. And we forget that one of the things that we've been warned about somewhere in the general vicinity of drunkenness and orgies is envy, factions, dissensions, and selfish ambition.

Now I believe that educational institutions have a responsibility to be concerned about being excellent in a general sense. But I get very weary of educational institutions becoming puffed up in their pride about their excellence in such a way that they impart to their students a sense of superiority for having been benefited by God and their fellow man by being given this royal ticket on this most excellent vehicle that will ultimately assure them that all their selfish ambitions will be fulfilled. I think it's very unfortunate that within the area of religious education, Christian colleges, theological seminaries we do so much of this comparing that says, ours is better than yours. Where I went is obviously better than where he went, and all the rest of this stuff that satisfies our ego. Now we have a tension; we have a problem. On the one hand, we know that this flies in the face of some of the Pauline advice with reference to effective Christianity and effective leadership. And on the other hand, we don't want to be in any situation that is unconcerned about our delivering our best, unconcerned about the standards within the institution and within the expectations of the institution. And we're caught in a bit of a dilemma. Which end of the dilemma do we buy into? May I suggest to you that the problem may be that it's the wrong dilemma. That we may be just better off by backing off from that argument and get into a competency argument that said what God expects of us is that we be competent. That we be his ministers in terms of the standards of effectiveness that he prescribes for his people.

Now, indeed, the word excellence does occur in Scripture so I don't necessarily need any five of you to come to me afterward and remind me that it appears in Scripture. I know that it does. And I carefully warned when I said something deleterious, detracting, about the word excellence that I'm concerned about the word excellence because of what it means in our culture. Our culture, as North Americans, is largely a highly competitive, highly individualistic culture in which individualisms and the striving toward individual excellence becomes virtually a matter of tyranny. In many fields, people learn that the only way to be outstanding is to stand on someone else, and if in the process of standing on someone else you hurt them, so sorry.

Unfortunately, one of the characteristics today of education in both law and medicine is a level of excellence demanded of students that is virtually impossible for all but a small handful. And fallen humankind being what it is, many of those in the educational establishments for medicine and law find it necessary to become very adept at beating the game and doing all sorts of things that might be classified as dishonest. One wonders about the professional fields that virtually force their students to become dishonest in order to survive in that field. All of this in the name of excellence.

Now I'm sure that doesn't occur in theological seminaries, but I'll tell you one thing that does occur in theological seminaries that gives me a great deal of concern. Survival in the theological seminary quite often depends on a level of academic performance that requires certain compromises—requires compromising one's own spiritual development. For some, it teases them into neglect of family. For some, it virtually forces them, as they see it, into neglect of time in the word for the continued spiritual development of oneself as a Christian person. And it becomes very tempting for us to substitute all that academic rational stuff we are doing with theology and with the

Scriptures, in the academic sense, to substitute all of that for the vitality of a growing spiritual condition within our own lives. I do not ask you to hold up your hands on this matter, but I would point out that excellence often has a price.

Competency, however, is quite a different matter because competency is something that we can continue to strive for. We are never pigeonholed as we are in the excellence issue. Most of you by now, academically, know where you are in the excellence pigeonholes. You're somewhere else but at the very top; and you know, by virtue of your survival to this point, that you're not at the very bottom. Though some of you may wonder if you may find yourself there sooner or later. But in matters of competency, we can make a life commitment to continue a development process in our lives and in our professionalism that will continue to make us ever more competent. You see, individualism defines excellence, but social worth describes competency. The imagery of the Scripture gives us the picture of the church as a body, as a related fellowship of persons complementing one another, fulfilling various roles and tasks so that we are a whole unit. Would that our society were more holistic. Would that our society were more keenly aware of the importance of community. I believe that people of the church as they become more competent in Christ, both those in ministry and those that we classify sometimes as the laity—the whole of the body of Christ. We're becoming more and more competent in terms of the actions and the behaviors and the qualities described in Galatians 5 and 6. *That*, indeed, is competency.

I think it's wrong to use these things as excellency measures because then it tends to make us focus on who gets the stars. Who gets the emblems. Who gets the award certificates. If we look at this as competency, it's everybody's job. We've all got to deal with it. We've all have to deal with it from where we are. You see, part of my problem is that I, as an educator, happen not to believe in education which, of course, raises one *more* question. Now, obviously, I'm making a play on words. I wouldn't have invested nearly forty years of my life as a professional educator if it weren't with a strong commitment to my possibilities to be competent as an educator. And I feel very competent as an educator. I feel that I'm more competent than I used to be, and I'm growing in competency. I always am a little bit nonplussed when people start into the excellency stuff, but I am competent and I feel good about it. But I don't believe that education is the end. If we mean formal education and what we do in schools and what we do in the process of becoming more knowledgeable, I don't believe in that stuff except as a vehicle, except as a tool, except as a part of a larger scheme. So there! Relax. I do believe in it. But I believe in it in its place.

You see, the problem is that education, as viewed in the Western world and, in fact, in much of the modernizing world, education is largely concerned with what happens from here up. Think about it. Virtually everything that gets measured, everything that gets tested, everything that gets written about in credentials of an academic sort, tends to be concerned with things that happen from here up and it tends not even to deal with a smile. Education is largely a matter of what the head is doing. This isn't necessarily irrelevant. I think that the good Lord put a head on our shoulders so that it might be used and I am thankful that Christianity is among the rare religions of the world that are concerned with a knowledge—not simply a mysticism. Over and over in Scripture, Old Testament and New, we read we read phrases like, God does not wish us to be ignorant. God does not wish us to be malinformed. And as we look today at churches that had difficulties and in individuals that had difficulties, we find out that so often the root of the difficulty, the root of the problem, the root of sin is the failure to be informed from the Word of God. Yes, education is important.

But education that is really important for the Christian has to be defined in a very peculiar way. It has to be defined in such a way, as in the Galatians passage, that there is something said about living by the Spirit; let us keep in step with the Spirit. In other words, until we get that wholeness of *living by* in terms of faith claims and *walking with* in terms of action and behavior, we really haven't got it all together. And, unfortunately, so much of formal education is given to preparation for a behavior that is to follow later. More is the pity. Let me give you a case in point. By the year 1900, the United States had many medical schools. Medical education is largely a creature of the latter part of the 19th century. At the time of the Civil War, there was hardly anything called a medical school worth its salt. By the year 1900, however, this country had medical schools on virtually every major street corner and they were largely street corner medical schools. And, in fact, they were teaching all sorts of marvelous stuff using cadavers purchased from mortuaries and borrowed from cemeteries as their teaching instrument. And virtually everyone in medical education knew full well what a dead body looked like, felt like, smelled like. And they played with them and they did things with them and they cut into them and they re-organized them and they sewed them back up again. And they developed all kinds of skills by watching people give examples with real people and by doing things with dead bodies. That was medical education in about 1900 in the United States.

One of the early social science studies in the fields of professional education was done with funds from the Carnegie Foundation—a study commissioned in 1904 and I think reported in in 1909 or 1910—the famous study performed by an early social scientist by the name of Abraham Flexner. The Flexner study showed that in the United States in this vast number of medical schools—and, by the way, these medical schools were little operations with four or five, six students at a time. We're not talking about massive operations here. But this country had hundreds of them. In virtually none of the medical education establishments at that period that Abraham Flexner find students doing educational processes in context of live, real subjects. Medical degrees were available for people who had only messed with cadavers. Medical school degrees were given to people who had only attended lectures. Medical education was evaluated largely in terms of tests—tests of the head. And medical practice in the United States was abysmal.

When the study was released, the effect was virtually electric. Within three years, over half of the medical schools in the United States closed down because the American public was not ready to accept that kind of education for people concerned with life and death matters. And out of that period in our century grew the tradition which we know today as the medical education establishment which, interestingly, is the best researched area today of all the areas of professionalism. It is an area of education that always, within every medical school anywhere, has a research unit studying the medical education process. And the medical education field, thanks to the Flexner study and the Carnegie endowment in 1906, 1910, has really led the way in the United States for the study of the professional development of people in the professions. And today virtually every area of professionalism in the United States in its educating establishment has research processes dealing with the effective preparation of the people for those fields. This is true in architecture. It is true in law. It is true, obviously, in all the facets of medicine. It is true, even in areas of technical education such as airline pilot training. There is not an airline pilot training center in the world that does not today have an internal research unit studying the processes and guaranteeing that what is done in that preparation produces people who are effective and competent in the field. The issue is not excellence; the issue is competency.

There is one professional area that has not followed in this pattern. There is one professional area that has attended virtually no matters internally to the institutions. Only its accreditation association has addressed the research problems at all and then has tended to address them in a very biased way dominated by a handful of schools who have a very peculiar notion of what the task is in that field. And I'm not going to tell you what the professional field is. I'm going to let you guess. But one of the ways that you might get a clue is to look around you and ask where are the people doing research on my preparation for ministry? And as a matter of fact, today, we know of virtually no field that tolerates as high a failure rate in first assignment in the field as does that particular professional field. The failure rate—let me not be cute about it—in ministry is appalling! We need much more concern for competency. Part of our problem is the field of theological education, for some strange reason, has decided that the word professional is not a good word; hence, the topic for my talk today, Professional is a Good Word.

When my doctor told me that my electrocardiogram a few weeks ago looked like I had swallowed a duck because he said it was quacking in a strange place, he sent me to a cardiologist. Now the cardiologist says now you understand that this fellow is just a really nice man. He has a good relational style. He really is into people. He is very, very concerned about people like you and you will find him very comforting. I didn't hear that at all. My doctor said this cardiologist is a solid professional man, very competent. That's what I wanted to hear; that's what I wanted to hear. My car had something wrong with the electrical system a few weeks earlier than that and I asked my neighbor what do you do in this particular neighborhood. I'm still new to the neighborhood. When you get a car with a bad electrical system? He says, I have a cousin who is really relational, really into people, loves cars, had a car a lot like yours. No. He said I can tell you a mechanic who is a real pro. When you talk about mechanics, you talk about pros. When you talk about cardiologists, you talk about professionals. But the concept is the same: he is competent.

We're turning out in ministry, I'm afraid, people that are caught in a bind. On the one hand, ministry is different in that ministry does depend on a high degree of relational behavior, a high degree of concern for people, high degree of warmth, a high degree of personality and interpersonal involvement. Absolutely. God be praised. Amen. But that doesn't mean we can't also be concerned about competency. And I think that should be one of the major distinctions between people who are called to ministry but haven't accepted much help, and those who are called to ministry and have sought the kind of help that can come from a proper education that will bring them into competency. I think part of our problem is that because of this negative valuation of *professional*, we're just not really sure we want to be a profession. It might do us a little bit of good to look and see what is involved in being a profession, and there's a great deal of research on professionalism, itself.

Perhaps the most important researcher in this field; no longer doing much work but, nevertheless, has made a tremendous contribution to the sociology of professions is Myron Lieberman. Myron Lieberman, in his work on professions and professionalism, has led the way in terms of our understanding of what professions are all about and how we can have one or, by neglect, how we cannot have one. I'm doing a kind of a shortened version for benefit of the shortness of time, this morning, and I'm going to mention five facets out of the somewhat larger list of Lieberman characteristics.

First of all, a profession is a group of people involved in a socially valued function. In other words, their work is valued in society. What they do is important. Now I suspect the ministry of Jesus Christ is in good shape on that one, though sometimes I think the way we go at it would make people wonder if really we see our value to society. Sometimes I think the ministers of the gospel tend to reduce themselves into little ghetto organizers having value to people who are a lot like them. And if we really want to have a professional image within the whole of society, we have to be concerned about how we make contribution to the whole society and I think this is also biblical.

You'll notice how our passage ends this morning, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to . . ." what's the next word? "all people; let us do good to all people." But then it says, "especially to those who belong to the family of believers." And I think the issue is sometimes we read only the last part of that. The ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ should be defined in terms of community impact and community involvement. You have no way to escape it if you're faithful to this instruction. Competency in ministry is involvement with all people in which you are doing good for all people, and especially to the community of faith. That's what our Lord says; that's what the Scriptures say.

The second characteristic that I would identify from Lieberman's lists is that a profession is a group of people who hold and operate with special skills, which have been enhanced by special training. In other words, there is something about this set of people that sets them somewhat apart by virtue of their having special skills. I would wonder if you have reflected on yourself: what are your special skills in ministry? The issue here is not special knowledge; that comes later in our list. The issue here is special skills. What is it that you do uniquely well because you are a minister? I would suggest at least one of these: a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ should be following the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ in many particulars and especially in the matter of being able to listen to people. Our Lord was a good listener. You look at his one-on-one relationships and one-on-one conversations all the way through the gospels and you will find a person inevitably getting on the wavelength of the other person. Our Lord got on people's wavelengths no matter where they were. He heard in what they were saying, as they would come to him with a question or with a problem, he would hear what their concern was and he would immediately pick up at that point and deal with them. He was not in the business of changing the subject on people. I get so sick and tired of ministers who can't talk about anything except the little pat stuff that they've organized; that they know a lot about and want to tell people about. I don't think you win people to Christ that way. I don't think you nurture the faithful that way. I don't think you influence communities that way. A specialized skill of ministry should be that we are among the society's most able listeners, and we can relate to people competently where they're hurting. There are other special skills. Ask yourself, what are these in my own case?

Third: a profession has a well-defined knowledge base. A profession has a well-defined knowledge base. Ah, you say. There's one we're safe on because we have a well-defined knowledge base. We have knowledge of the Word and of the process skills by which the Word can be properly handled. Yes, well and good. But I submit that, in many cases, our knowledge base is truncated, is cut short, is not completely understood. For example, I believe that we tend to think of the Bible as the whole of our knowledge base rather than understanding the Scripture to be God's special revelation and God has also provided a general revelation. Oh, but you say, that's secular. Well, here again, as in Monday's talk, when you draw that line you're in trouble from the word go. It's a line the Scripture doesn't know anything about. The Scripture does know about the distinction between

spiritual and carnal, but that's not the point we're trying to make with that. Usually we're talking about things you study in Sunday school and theological schools, and things you study in other kinds of educative environments. And I keep reminding people that Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's" —the whole shebang!

And important Christian philosophers of the 20th century generally all say about what Gaebelein says, although they generally say it in somewhat different ways, "All truth is God's truth." And Art Holmes has picked up on this: all truth is God's truth. The Christian philosophers of our time were addressing correctly that we cannot delimit ourselves as ministers of the gospel to matters in the special revelation and ignore the general revelation. You say well, I can't possibly learn everything about physics and everything about biology and everything about astronomy and everything about theology all at the same time. No, but you can avoid disdain that knowledges. You can avoid disdain that knowledge which we find many in ministry doing. And, furthermore, you can take seriously an area that we haven't even mentioned and that is the study of the human being: social science. I believe that, until the ministry takes more seriously the need to deal with both ends of that rope—remember the metaphor? We learn well how to tie the rope at one end and tie it snugly around the Word. But oftentimes we don't know enough about people to be able to tie the rope snugly around people, so we get in at the middle of that rope and reel it in and we keep bringing in the Word but we don't bring in the people. Our task is to bring the Word and people together, and that requires some understanding of people.

Now this is not an argument for a masters degree in social science, but it is an argument for understanding and deliberate attempt to gain understanding and competency in matters of human communication, matters of human relationship and, for heaven's sake, learning something about development patterns in human beings. There's a marvelous literature out there today. In fact, there are a number of Christian people now bringing it across so even the stuff appears in Christian bookstores. But let me tell you, for every one decent piece in a Christian bookstore there are twenty in other bookstores that deal with materials that we really ought to wrap ourselves around because God does not expect us to be ignorant of the object of his acts of redemption. I think we do the Word, itself, a disservice when we presume it to be the whole of our special knowledge. Our special knowledge base needs expanding. But one other little warning: sometimes people even use that special knowledge base from Scripture and from the handling of Scripture as a kind of a tool to bat people over the head with.

I guess part of the reason I am as I am today is because I'm still working out a kind of childhood frustration. I suspect that accounts for most of us in life. As more mature people, you see a person still trying to work out a problem created when he was 9-, 10-, and 11-years-old. One of the points at which I realized that I was in trouble because ministry didn't seem to kind of relate to where I was at, was when my pastor kept using his Greek knowledge to tell me, as a young teenager, that I wasn't able to read the Bible by myself. And I was trying to because sermon after sermon he would laud his Greek by saying now, brethren, what you see in your Bible says A+B equals C, but I tell you in the Greek what it really says is D and E equals goldfish. And I, you know, I thought, Wow! This is really something. You really can't trust what you're reading here because until you have his kind of knowledge and, you know, what I'm going to have to do—You see, I hadn't even understood yet what Catholics were all about. What I really ought to do is quit reading and expect him to explain it to me. Sometime later I discovered that's what's wrong in Catholicism. And sometime later than that, I discovered that's what the Reformation was all about. The ministry

locking up the Word into magic syllables that only they could understand. Now I do not decry Greek and Hebrew; I think it's a valuable tool skill. But brothers and sisters do not use your special knowledge, as a professional, to club people.

My daughter is an M.D. My daughter-in-law is an M.D. I have two girls in my family who are M.D's. And one of the things that they are very careful, even with their papa, is not to throw big words. And my charming Angela said to me the other day, Dad, the problem there is swelling. She was looking at my deformed ankle. I said, I don't think its swelling. She says, let me show you how we know its swelling. And she gingerly put her finger on it, held it for about thirty seconds, pulled it off and there was a great big dent there; looked like I'd been wounded for life. She says, when it does that it's swelling. She's beautiful because she doesn't use her knowledge as a club. She allows me into her world of understanding without big words and without arguing that I'm only a layman. We have to be very careful how we use our specialized knowledge.

Fourth: it isn't a profession if the group of people aren't doing some self-regulation. Ah, you see, we don't have to do that. You see we don't need to worry about that because, after all, we're all just working for God and God himself is going to regulate us. Well, once upon a time there was a brother, and I think he's a brother. I'm not sure I'm happy about thinking of him that way. His name is Jim and his last name is Baker. And he needed to be in a profession that had some self-regulation going because they'd have regulated him a long time ago and quite possibly prevented the scars on the face of evangelical Christianity that we know today out of the Jim Baker case. See what I mean? We're not sufficiently proactive on these matters because we really aren't, as a ministry, a profession. Now part of it is we've got ourselves all schismatically divided up all over the place in denominations and we don't want to really do anything collectively, you know. This is our business, you know, and it's not your business. I'll never forget the encounter I had with a certain very bright individual in California who organized a very campus-oriented crusade. Once upon a time, when I challenged him about whether that was his ministry or God's ministry because he kept saying don't try to tell me, this is mine. Don't try to tell me, this is the way I think it ought to be done. And I said dear brother, God has entrusted you with this, but it's his ministry not yours.

We need self-regulation—individual entrepreneurs in the faith, you know. The parachurch organizations, they do their thing. Denominations do their thing. Everybody wants to do his own thing. Isn't it high time that, as people of God in ministry, we come together and do some self-regulating. To say there is some sense of right and wrong and we've got to be concerned about it and we've got to be organized. Now, you know, they finally forced this on the parachurch organizations through the forming of the Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability, ECFA. And the organizations are now affiliated to try to do some self-policing in matters of money. Good. Good. Let's do it. Let's do it all over the place. Let's do it with reference to lots of things and let's do it. In the name of our Lord, let's build a competency in our profession through a professionalism that says I am not free. I must be responsible to the whole of those who are in ministry. And that needs to be, I think, at least denominational. If people would at least do it denomination-wide, I'd be happy. But I find little sectors and districts, and every set of standards is different, and policing structures are different; and ultimately it's not really self-regulation, it's policing, it's hierarchical.

And that brings me to the fifth and the last point. You can't do any of that without another mark of a profession. Lieberman points out that a profession isn't really a profession until it has a standardized Code of Ethics. There is in the medical profession worldwide, an allegiance to the

Hippocratic Oath. And if you go through that Hippocratic Oath, you're impressed that this old Greek codger, who lived long before Christ, really had a keen sense of what it meant to be a competent person serving a community. And the Hippocratic Oath is not simply some corny old bag of Greek language. It translates well into English and it has a standard in virtually the whole world for the educational fraternity. Don't tell me that the Word of God doesn't give us frames of reference that would build worldwide Codes of Ethics for the ministry.

Let me be specific enough to at least suggest in these parting moments that until we really get serious about the fact that the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife was put in there for a purpose. Until we can get really clear on when it is appropriate and when it is not appropriate for the minister to close the door on a counseling session, we are in trouble. I have said it before I'll say it again. There's nobody here who has not been in the position of Joseph with Potiphar's wife, or who will not be sometime in life. We've got to have something bigger than the moment of inspiration to guide us because not all of us are as good at the moment of inspiration as Joseph was. We need to get a lot more serious about this. It's not as if we have rampant problems. I think we have problems and I don't think they are rampant problems. I'm not, you know, I'm not raving. But I'm saying that every one of us needs to know that there is some sense of accountability to a framework of ethics in which we know when we violated it. And it ought to deal not with just don't go to bed with Potiphar's wife, but when do you allow the door to get closed? And whether or not there's a secretary in the outer office makes a difference, and there ought to be something said about that. I think we ought to not only teach that in the seminaries in terms of how you handle yourself in matters of sex, in matters of money, in matters of privacy—especially confidentiality of information—and in matters of power and how you use it. Those are the four sectors that I think our Code of Ethics absolutely must deal with. I'll repeat them: sex, money, privacy, and power. And you could probably name a few more. Can you show me to a Code of Ethics within your denomination? I would like to think that you could, but I've never seen it. Can you show me a Code of Ethics that would even be a nomination for all ministers in this country? Why don't we have such a thing? Lawyers do, doctors do, undertakers do, landscape architects do, hairdressers do. God help us! You see a profession is a matter of service. It's not a matter of personal excellence. It's a matter of competency to serve.

One of the passages of Scripture that I dearly love because of its complexity and its interrelationship of the various facets of God's revelation is Psalm 19. And, in closing, I'd like to read with you the last portion of Psalm 19 where the Psalmist brings together, after exalting the Creation and exalting the Word and then reflecting beautifully upon the importance of experience through which we come to an understanding of God, summarizes it all with a little prayer that I would like you to bow as we pray together, listening quietly, reflecting on the Word of God in Psalm 19 verse 12 to the end. Let us pray. "Who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen.