

When my father died, the editor of our newspaper summarized his life in three words: minister, counselor, friend. I'll say but a few words about him as minister as I'm not qualified to judge him as a theologian. But he was considered one of the greatest preachers in our small denomination.

As counselor, he gladly gave his advice to any who sought it. People of both races came to him for various problems. One young lady was worried about the sexual sins of her brother. Sometimes he was consulted about keeping the Sabbath day, such as whether it was o.k. to take a pleasure trip on the Sabbath. He had to explain that he couldn't give a yes or no answer to specific activities on the Lord's day. He preferred the Bible verse which says, "Thou shalt call the Sabbath a delight." Of course now nobody gives Sabbath-keeping a thought, but it was a serious matter when I was young, and it was particularly difficult for the preacher's family.

Much of Papa's counseling was presented to us at meal time. When we were children, eight of us, we gathered around the table for breakfast, dinner, and supper. While we were all together was a good time for Papa to try to teach us many things, but I remember in particular he taught us how to treat our fellow man. He was careful not to criticize, especially those who were less fortunate. Occasionally, we, as children, would "make fun" of someone's illiteracy, but we were quickly squelched with the remark that "most people do the best they can with their circumstances." After supper, he read the Bible; then we got up and knelt by our chairs while he prayed.

Although there were no racial uprisings or demonstrations during his lifetime, Papa worried about our treatment of the black people. He felt our treatment of them was a sin to which we would some day have to answer. I was

glad he wasn't living during the years of the uprisings. He would have suffered whether he stayed on the segregation side or whether he went with the liberals.

A few times Papa spoke for the black people, for which he was rebuffed. One day a Negro man came to him when Papa was serving on the County Board of Education. The man's complaint was that the County Superintendent of Education had taken the job of one of the schools' teachers and given it to another. Since the one who brought the complaint to Papa considered the deposed teacher better than the teacher who replaced him, he hoped Papa might somehow reinstate him. Papa told him to get up a petition and take it to the Superintendent of Education. This he did, but to no avail. Papa then had to go to the Superintendent of Education to use his influence. The Superintendent scoffed at the petition, and for his trouble, Papa was not asked to serve on the board after that. (In those days, the Superintendent appointed the board members.)

Another instance concerning race: during World War II, the draftees met at the court house for a going-away ceremony which was to include a small gift. It was suggested that the black draftees not be given quite as much as the white draftees. My father vehemently objected. "All should be given the same amount," he said. His remark brought about some sheepish denials, such as "we really didn't mean that," and I think all were given the same amount. Papa's stand may sound like "no big deal," but it did take courage to go against the custom of the day.

Papa visited in homes and businesses. Today it would be unheard of to go in a grocery store except as a customer, but in the "old days," merchants welcomed visitors who just wanted to talk. We had some stores run by people who had moved here from either Syria or Lebanon. Some could not speak English at first. They found a friend in Papa, and he was successful in getting

some of them to join his church. One Chinese man joined our church. There was a store on Main Street run by John Bozano, who I believe was from Greece; Papa visited him often and much to our delight as children, he brought home candy which Mr. Bozano had given him for free.

Papa came home from a train trip one night bringing a poor sick man we had never seen to spend the night. Papa explained that while on the train, the man (a Mr. Klack) had fits (probably epilepsy), and since Mr. Klack had no family with him, Papa brought him to spend the night with us. The next morning Papa took him to a local hotel. (We didn't have many facilities to help in a case like this.) I never heard what finally happened to Mr Klack.

A black woman who cooked for us developed a tumor. Papa had a surgeon friend in Rock Hill who offered his services for treatment. Papa took her to the hospital by train, each riding in a separate coach of course.

About women, Papa said they were "to be on a pedestal, the standard bearers for society. Everything a man does is to please a woman." That's what he told me as he gave me a "dressing down" for working in the yard in shorts! Feminists today would drive him out of town. About money, he advised, "Don't buy anything unless you can pay for it, and pay your bills as soon as possible." He went to the local stores the first of each month to pay his bills, sometimes arriving before the storekeeper had prepared the bill, at which time he was asked please return later.

About church, he naturally thought as a minister that everyone should attend regularly. Each Sunday dinner, he would mention those who weren't at church and sadly say, "Don't they care about their souls?" Worries about racial injustice and church attendance were his main burdens.

I'm sure all ministers during their work for the church are subjected to a snub or two. Papa had his share of them, but when he had them, he set an example for us of how to deal with them. Some came from close relatives, but he never allowed them to ruin family relationships. Not long after Papa began his ministry in Winnsboro, one of his wife's nephews got married. The bride, a member of Papa's church, chose not to have her new uncle to marry her. The minister she chose was from another part of the state and apparently the bride thought he would add more class to the ceremony. That slight was never discussed at home, and Papa made a special effort to stay on friendly terms with the bride's family. Another close family relative, influenced by his wife, left the church in the early years of Papa's ministry. Papa and Mama had every reason to feel animosity, but they never let this break bonds with the family. Often incidents such as these can cause wounds in a family which never heal. Thankfully, though, through all the years, all relatives of these families have lived in peace and love, thanks to Papa and Mama.

Papa was on the board of Trustees at a small college in South Carolina when the question arose of getting the college fully accredited. To attain that accreditation, college professors and instructors would have to be paid a higher salary than they currently received. The board suggested (or passed) a resolution to raise the salaries to qualify, but to have the professors return the raise to the college because the college could not afford the higher salaries. Papa could not go along with that deception, and for his opposition to it, he was dropped from the board. When told he was no longer needed, he took the news in stride and offered his services if he should be needed later.

Although Papa was considered an excellent preacher and a good pastor his church never grew very large. One of his sons said that he wasn't

competitive, meaning, I think, that he didn't strive to be anything like a big city preacher. A former editor of The Charlotte Observer once wrote that but for the love of his own small denomination, he could have had a large church in a larger denomination.

In spite of changing times, some it appeared not for the better, he always was optimistic and thought the world was getting better. He eagerly accepted modern inventions though he bought very few. He was cheerful, happy, and contented throughout his life.

Mary Johnson Laney

January 1999