

The Samurai Model of Ministry

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With regard to a philosophy of ministry, a number of metaphors could be employed to describe the Christian minister—shepherd, steward, parent, servant, etc. All of these are Biblical, and all provide excellent insight into the role of Minister. However, at the realization that I had been called primarily to teach Scripture and defend its truth, I wanted to find a metaphor for my personal call to ministry that would take into account the primacy of God’s written word. The Biblical image that captured my interest and attention as a teacher comes from the Letter to the Hebrews:

“For the Word of God is living, active, sharper than any double-edged sword, and piercing to the point of separating soul and spirit, joint and even marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12, *personal translation*).

Here God’s Word is likened to a living, deadly, razor-sharp sword. This isn’t a lone example of the sword metaphor; we also find the Word of God likened to a sword in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus:

‘Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word.’ (Eph. 6:17, HCSB¹)

In addition to these two sword passages, we also find depictions of Jesus words as a double-edged sword multiple times in Revelation², and the Prophet Isaiah’s words—which are really the words of God—are likened to a sword as well.³ Taking into account

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

² Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21

³ Isa. 49:2

these descriptions of God’s Word as a sword, I sought to find a metaphor for Christian ministry in which the sword was an integral component.

I also knew that one of the main images Jesus Himself used to describe Christian ministry is that of a servant. While space does not permit a complete catalogue of passages describing God’s ministers as servants, a few examples loom large in Scripture, and are worth noting. Moses⁴, the whole nation of Israel⁵, the “Suffering Servant” of the Lord in Isaiah’s later prophecies⁶, Jesus’ declaration about the Son of Man not coming to be served, but to serve⁷, and Paul’s constant reference to himself as “a servant/slave” of the Lord⁸ are but a few examples. The idea that the Christian minister in service to a master and views Scripture—which is likened to a sword—as his or her primary weapon dovetail perfectly into one fascinating metaphor—that of the Samurai of feudal Japan. And the more I studied the Samurai, the more fitting the metaphor became in my mind.

The Samurai—ancient Japanese warriors devoted to their masters and renowned for their skill in wielding the *katana* (sword)—provide a striking parallel to the person called to minister through teaching God’s Word. And while the many warrior metaphors in Scripture have usually been visualized using European imagery (such as the Roman Soldier or medieval knight), the imagery of the Samurai seems equally fitting—if not more so—and may also possess cross cultural value that images of Knights and Crusaders, with all their historical baggage, are not able to achieve.

Samurai/Minister as Obedient Servant

⁴ Dan. 9:11, Mal. 4:4

⁵ Psa. 136:22, Isa. 44:21, 45:44, Jer. 30:10, Eze. 28:25

⁶ Isa. 49:3-10; 52:13-53:12

⁷ Mat. 20:26-28; Mar. 10:42-45

⁸ Act. 16:17; Rom. 1:1; 1Cor. 3:5; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:23; Tit. 1:1

The term “Samurai” refers to any warrior in medieval Japanese history permitted to bear the sword in service of a Daimyo (Feudal lord). However, the word itself is more specifically and correctly translated as “*one who serves.*”⁹ In fact, the single most important role of the Samurai was to completely and utterly carry out the will of the master to whom he or she had pledged obedience. Upon the issuing of a command by a direct superior, “any Samurai worthy of the name would respond without a moment’s hesitation.”¹⁰ Such obedient devotion is reminiscent of the devotion showed to David by the Three mighty men who, upon hearing David’s off-the-cuff remark about the water in Bethlehem, broke through the Philistine garrison and retrieved some of it for their King.¹¹ This level of devotion serves as an example of what the Christian minister should strive to emulate in his or her service to the True Davidic King; and just as the Samurai were the embodiment of what it means to serve, the Christian minister should possess the same reputation. Jesus taught His followers that this type of service was the highest duty to which they could aspire and was evidence of true greatness:

“Then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest. But He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles dominate them, and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and whoever leads, like the one serving. For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? Isn’t it the one at the table? But I am among you as the One who serves.” (Luke 22:24-27)

Samurai/Minister as Completely Devoted

⁹ Ratti, Oscar and Westbrook, Adele, Secrets of the Samurai: The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan. p.83.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.93

¹¹ 2Sam. 23:13-17 (cf. also 1Chron. 11:15-19)

For the Samurai, it wasn't enough to merely serve, they were to be *wholly devoted* to their Daimyo. It was a given that a Samurai would lay down his or her life if it would serve the interest or desire of their superior. They were men and women who

*“served a master; therefore, the primary function they were professionally called upon to perform was that of carrying out any and all orders issued by those superiors to whom they had pledged their loyalty and that of their families. This obligation bound each retainer directly to the leader he had chose or inherited as his Daimyo and who had accepted his oath of loyalty and service.”*¹²

So complete was their devotion that it often had dire consequences:

*“The relationship between the retainer and his Daimyo in feudal times was so binding and exclusivist that it actually proved a serious obstacle to the further development of the military class, for when the various leaders fought among themselves (as they did for centuries), their cohorts of warriors, for the most part, followed them unquestioningly into one decimating battle after another...”*¹³

This type of intense devotion is certainly no less than what Jesus required of His followers. Those who wish to serve their Lord Jesus (the only true Daimyo) must be ready to do so regardless of the dangers or. The Christian minister must be ready to “lose their lives” for the sake of the Gospel without fear.¹⁴ One of the most inspiring stories in Scripture depicting such devotion is that of Shadrach, Meshiah, and Abednego and their encounter with King Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. Though threatened with death, the three young men unflinchingly declared to the King: **“we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up”** (Dan. 3:18). Now the vast majority of us who minister in the world of western democracy will never face such direct threats to our lives; but thousands of our fellow ministers around the world are exposed to such dangers

¹² Ibid., p.83

¹³ Ibid., p.83

¹⁴ Matt 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35f; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25

daily. And like the Samurai, they readily give up their lives in service of their Lord.¹⁵ This is what true service and devotion to the Lord looks like. This is what it means for the minister to be a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1).¹⁶

Samurai/Minister as Owned by the Lord

The Samurai “had to be prepared to serve his master primarily in his capacity as a warrior...His entire philosophy, accordingly, revolved around the concept of complete disregard for his own safety, even his own life, which, by oath, he had placed unreservedly at his master’s disposal.”¹⁷ For the Samurai, his or her life belonged not to themselves, but to their Daimyo. So too should Christian ministers realize that they are not their own, they have been bought with a price¹⁸, and are now servants of the True Daimyo. This was certainly the mindset of James¹⁹, Peter²⁰, and Paul—who frequently referred to himself as the Lord’s δούλος (servant/slave).²¹ For true servants of the Lord, as for the Samurai, the interests of those whom they are serving take priority over their own; and such disregard for one’s own interests in service to others was modeled by none other than Jesus Himself. Therefore, it should also be modeled by those who claim Him

¹⁵ This devotion, was often taken to extremes as “*the retainer, his family, and his dependents became totally identified with their master, whose desires and wishes became, from that moment on, their own. So all-encompassing was the bond thus established that when a master died (even of natural causes) many of his retainers took their own lives in order to follow him in death as they had followed him in life.*” (Ratti and Westbrook, pp.86-87)

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that one of the main types of sacrifice under Levitical law was the עֹלָה (‘olah) which was *entirely devoted* to YHWH. As living sacrifices, Christians should likewise be *entirely devoted*—and the minister should exemplify this to the Body of Christ daily.

¹⁷ Ratti and Westbrook, p.91

¹⁸ 1Cor. 6:19b-20.

¹⁹ James 1:1

²⁰ 2Pet. 1:1

²¹ Cf. footnote 9 above.

as their Master. Paul specifically elaborates on the disregard for self shown by Jesus as being the model for the true follower:

“[You should be] not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:4-8, TNIV²²)

Samurai/Minister as Warrior

Because of the Gospel’s emphasis on peace, as well as the early church’s commitment to pacifism, many Christians may object to the Samurai metaphor because of the inherent violent connotations such imagery possesses. Certainly we must be clear that the Gospel calling *is* a calling to seek peace in the world—peace between God and humanity, as well as peace between humans themselves—and so one must be careful when using warrior imagery to describe the role of the minister.

However, it should be kept in mind that the goal of the Samurai lords of feudal Japan was to unite the realm in a peaceful and harmonious state. But like any human endeavor, the dreams of the Daimyo and their faithful Samurai were marred with sin, and the result was one Daimyo after another vying for ultimate power and using any means necessary to secure it—including treachery, deceit, selfishness, violence, and a disregard for human life. This is true of all human empires and their armies, but that doesn’t disqualify the warrior metaphor from being used to describe faithful servants of God

²² Most other modern English translations erroneously insert the word “only” into v.4. Not only is the word “only” not found in the Greek text, but it completely softens Paul’s intentionally-hard demand that believers NOT look to their own interests. The TNIV preserves Paul’s intent (cf. KJV, NRSV, New American Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, American Standard Version, English Revised Version).

because it is the image of the *ideal* warrior that the metaphor implies. We see this on numerous occasions in Scripture where the warrior metaphor is used of God's servants. In speaking of the eschatological victory of God, the Prophets likened even the lowliest of God's People to mighty warriors:

“Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for holy war; rouse the warriors; let all the men of war advance and attack! Hammer your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears. *Let even the weakling say: I am a warrior.* Come quickly, all you surrounding nations; gather yourselves. Bring down Your warriors there, LORD. Let the nations be roused and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit down to judge all the surrounding nations.” (Joel 3:9-12, emphasis mine)

Ephraim *will be like a warrior*, and their hearts will be glad as if with wine. Their children will see it and be glad; their hearts will rejoice in the Lord. I will whistle and gather them because I have redeemed them; they will be as numerous as they once were... Zechariah 10:12 I will strengthen them in the LORD, and *they will march* in His name—*this is Yahweh's declaration.* (Zechariah 10:7-8, 12, emphasis mine)

To see the call to Christian ministry, therefore, as likened to a call to arms in service to the Lord is by no means unbiblical.

Warrior imagery, in fact, is a key part of Jesus' Revelation to John. In this Apocalyptic vision, Jesus is pictured as a mighty warrior riding on a white horse and the church is described as His army—an army that has willingly laid down their lives in service of their Lord!²³ The call to Christian ministry is a call to enlist in the Spiritual army of God and serve as a faithful and mighty warrior. Paul's words to the young minister Timothy are probably the clearest case of Christian-as-Spiritual-Warrior metaphor to be found in Scripture:

²³ Rev. 19 (cf. also Rev. 7, where the “innumerable multitude” of martyrs is first described using an Israelite military census structure.)

“You then, my son, *be strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us *like a good soldier* of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.” (2 Timothy 2:1-4, emphasis mine)

Just as a warrior is concerned primarily with his duty to his superior officer, and just as the Samurai were concerned primarily with their martial service to their lord, so too Paul urges Timothy, as a minister of the Gospel, to be concerned primarily with carrying out the duties of the True Superior Officer, Christ Jesus.

Timothy is not the only example of this warrior metaphor found in Paul’s letters. In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul speaks of another “soldier” in service to the Daimyo Jesus:

But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus—my brother, co-worker, and *fellow soldier*, as well as your messenger and minister to my need... (Phil. 2:25, emphasis mine)

By referring to Epaphroditus as a “fellow soldier,” Paul was obviously embracing the soldier metaphor for himself as well. Therefore it is safe to conclude that warrior imagery is quite fitting when describing the role of minister.

Christian ministers can, *and in my opinion should*, think of themselves as God’s spiritual warriors! And once again, the Samurai serve as an excellent symbol of what it means to be a devoted warrior. It has been argued that the Samurai were history’s greatest warriors. Whether or not this is true, the Samurai certainly thought of themselves as such. As a professional warrior, the Samurai

“...had to be trained to think of himself as a man whose life was not his own...the warrior had to be always prepared for a sudden and violent end. His whole life as a warrior in the service of a military leader, in fact was a constant reminder of this...This conditioning, which made the Japanese

warrior's contempt for death renowned the world over, began in infancy."²⁴

The lack of fear of death possessed by the Samurai provides yet another contact point with the call to ministry found in Scripture. In addition to Shadrach's, Meshach's, and Abednego's courageous stand in the face of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace mentioned above, Scripture is filled with examples of servants of God who possessed the Samurai's "contempt for death." The Prophets risked their lives each time they uttered a judgment against a wicked ruler or king of Israel²⁵—and as Jesus reminded those who saw Him as an enemy of God's People, that though they built monuments to the Prophets, they were descended from the very people who killed these prophets.²⁶ The call to enlist in God's Spiritual army came with all the danger and possibility of death as that of a literal army. This is no less true for ministers of the Gospel, as is evidenced by the fact that 11 of the 12 Apostles suffered violent deaths for their faith! Yet despite the threat of death, the Christian minister must adopt the mindset of the Samurai; their life is not their own. They serve a faithful Daimyo who, *unlike* the Samurai's feudal lord, has conquered death itself and is able to see them through it and out the other side! Because of this, the Christian minister can triumphantly declare along with Paul, "O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?"²⁷

Not only did the Samurai not fear death, they were also willing to bear whatever other maladies and sufferings to which they were subjected in service to their Daimyo. Once again, this illustrates the attitude that all ministers of the Gospel should maintain.

²⁴ Ratti and Westbrook, p.92

²⁵ Cf. 1Ki. 19:1, 10, 14; Neh. 9:26; Acts 7:52; 1Thes. 2:15

²⁶ Luke 11:47-48

²⁷ 1Cor. 15:55

Calls to endure suffering in service to God appear continually in Scripture. God's ministers of the Old Covenant suffered for their faith:

“Because of You we are slain all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.” (Psalm 44:22, cf. Rom. 8:35)

“You know, LORD; remember me and take note of me. Avenge me against my persecutors. In Your patience, don't take me away. Know that I suffer disgrace for Your honor. Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart, for I am called by Your name, LORD God of Hosts. I never sat with the band of revelers, and I did not celebrate *with them*. Because Your hand was *on me*, I sat alone, for You filled me with indignation. Why has my pain become unending, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? You truly have become like a mirage to me-- water that is not reliable.” (Jeremiah 15:15-18)

Jesus, likewise, warned His followers that they would suffer as well:

“Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My name.” (Matthew 24:9)

“I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.” (John 16:33)

Jesus' words, of course, would begin to come true immediately after His death and Resurrection with the persecution of Peter and John²⁸, as well as the martyrdom of Stephen.²⁹ What is remarkable about Stephen's death (aside from the obvious courage and grace with which he faced it!) is that Stephen—the first Christian minister martyr—was chosen to serve not as an Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, or Teacher; he was chosen to wait tables!³⁰ Yet in true Samurai fashion, Stephen obediently served his Lord in a seemingly small capacity and ended up preaching the longest message recorded in the New Testament and losing his life for doing so! Stephen's story is one that has

²⁸ Acts 4:5-19

²⁹ Acts 6:8-8:2

³⁰ Acts 6:2-5

affected my view of ministry greatly and has shown me that the minister's only job is to obediently go to wherever God calls him or her and to do whatever God requires—even if what is required is comfort, peace, or life itself. This was the mindset of the Apostles and the early Church³¹; it should be ours as well!

Of course, no examination of the suffering to which the Christian minister may endure is complete without acknowledging the ministry of Paul—the very one who approved of Stephen's death. Paul's attitude toward suffering and even death is indeed reminiscent of the Samurai's. His first call to ministry involved suffering blindness as well as being shown what hardships he would experience as God's faithful servant.³² Paul's ministry was one of suffering for the sake of Jesus, our Lord—our Daimyo. Yet, just as the Samurai considered suffering for the sake of the Daimyo an honor and privilege, Paul called Jesus' warriors to see their sufferings in the same manner and never lose hope:

We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed.

We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who live are always given over to death because of Jesus, so that Jesus' life may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.

And since we have the same spirit of faith in accordance with what is written,...we also believe, and therefore speak, knowing that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and present us with you...

Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:8-18)

³¹ Cf. 1Thes. 3:3-4, Heb. 10:32-39, 1Pet. 1:6, Rev. 1:9, 2:9-11, 7:13-14

³² Acts 9:15-16 (cf. also Phil. 1:29-30)

But in everything, as God's ministers, we commend ourselves: by great endurance, by afflictions, by hardship, by pressures, by beatings, by imprisonments, by riots, by labors, by sleepless nights, by times of hunger, by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the message of truth, by the power of God; through weapons of righteousness on the right hand and the left, through glory and dishonor, through slander and good report; as deceivers yet true; as unknown yet recognized; as dying and look-- we live; as being chastened yet not killed; as grieving yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:4-10)

May this be the mindset that every Christian minister adopts in service of our Lord!

The Samurai/Minister as Experts in Wielding the Sword

As noted above, the Samurai's reputation as a fearsome, relentless warrior who walked unflinchingly into death in service of the Daimyo did not, of course, come naturally. It required intense lifelong training in devotion as well as in swordsmanship.

“[From the] time the child received his first real swords and armor...from this point in his life onward, he would be expected to specialize in the functions typical of his rank within the hierarchy of the clan, but without ever neglecting his training in the art of using the weapon that had been defined in the military codes as the “living soul of the samurai.” All warriors, regardless of rank were trained in swordsmanship. Those of the upper ranks, of course, had more time to devote to the pursuit of excellence in this art, and to the pursuit of superior instructors...”³³

In the same way, those whom God calls into His service—specifically those He calls to help equip and train His Spiritual army—should likewise be trained extensively in Scripture—even from childhood when possible. Again, we find Biblical examples of the Samurai sword-training mindset in the New Testament. Both Paul and Timothy were immersed in Scripture from an early age (though for very different reasons, respectively!) and were thus well-equipped to teach and preach God's Word like veteran Samurai

³³ Ratti and Westbrook, p.254

wielding the *katana*. In describing his rigorous Pharisaic training in Scripture to the Christians throughout Galatia, Paul states:

“...I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.” (Galatians 1:14)

Though not Christian in nature, upon conversion, this Scriptural training (as well as his training in Greco-Roman rhetoric and philosophy³⁴) would be used mightily by God to advance His Kingdom.

Timothy, on the other hand, was raised by Christians and learned Scripture as a child; and though he had no conversion epiphany like that of Paul (that we know of), Timothy’s childhood training in Scripture also became a mighty asset for this young warrior of the Lord. Paul recognized this skill and encouraged him to remain in training throughout his ministry:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Just as the Samurai began their training in using the *katana* at a young age, and continued to refine their skill and commitment throughout the rest of their life, so should Christian ministers seek to diligently devote themselves to learning, appreciating, understanding, interpreting, and teaching Scripture.³⁵ Paul’s admonition to young Timothy applies to every Christian minister who seeks to wield the “Sword of the Spirit”:

³⁴ Paul’s use of Greco-Roman Rhetorical technique is demonstrated in his letter to the Romans and his familiarity with philosophers of the day provided a valuable cultural bridge between him and his audience of Stoics and Epicureans at the Athenian Areopagus in Acts 17. (For or on Paul’s use of Rhetoric, cf. Witherington, Ben, III, Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary.)

³⁵ Cf., 1Tim. 4:6-7; Eph. 6:4; Heb. 12:11-12

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who *correctly handles the word of truth.*” (2 Timothy 2:15, emphasis mine)

For the Samurai, the *katana* was not just a weapon—it was encapsulated the Samurai’s entire existence:

“No mere symbol of power or object of admiration, however, the katana was a fearsome weapon in the hand of a man who *depended so completely upon it and identified himself so closely with it.* The study of the art of swordsmanship, known as Kenjutsu, was considered one of primary importance.”³⁶ (emphasis mine)

The Samurai’s devotion to skill with the sword above all else strikes me as the perfect metaphor for the Christian minister—especially those of us called by God to interpret and teach Scripture and train others to do the same. Though not literal warriors, God’s ministers and teachers are called to wage spiritual warfare against spiritual strongholds and enemy forces using spiritual weapons³⁷, chief among them being our spiritual *katana*—the Word of God.

The Samurai/Minister and Diversity of Roles

Though all Samurai were skilled at wielding the katana, not all were called by their Daimyo to use it in the same way or to the same degree. Among the Samurai, there existed a diversity of roles. Samurai consisted of calligraphers, accountants, bookkeepers, armorers, stable boys, groomers, palace guards and foot soldiers.³⁸ Each of these roles were necessary and each served the Daimyo in a much-needed capacity. They were all Samurai, but they were Samurai with differing responsibilities. For example, though the Daimyo’s palace guards were more skilled with the *katana*, they depended on

³⁶ Ratti and Westbrook, p.266

³⁷ 2Cor. 10:3-5

³⁸ Ratti and Westbrook, p.81

the less-skilled foot-soldiers for their security and the calligraphers, who rarely engaged in combat, for their orders and other communications. When each Samurai was fulfilling his or her role in the realm, the result was a powerful, well-functioning feudal domain.³⁹

The obvious parallel for those called to serve in leadership within God's Kingdom is the famous Body analogy found in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth:

“Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God is active in everyone and everything.

A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person to produce what is beneficial...But one and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each one as He wills.

For as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. So the body is not one part but many.

If the foot should say, "Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," in spite of this it still belongs to the body...*God has placed the parts, each one of them, in the body just as He wanted. And if they were all the same part, where would the body be?*

Now there are many parts, yet one body. So the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" nor again the head to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, all the more, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary...God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-25, emphasis mine)

One body, differing parts. One army, differing responsibilities. One Lord, different ministries. This must always be kept in mind by the Christian minister so as to maintain overall perspective of what God is doing throughout His realm.

³⁹ One of the greatest depictions of Samurai functioning in differing capacities but all for one common purpose—defending a peasant village from bandits—is Akira Kurosawa's epic masterpiece, *Seven Samurai*. This film is widely recognized by critics as the greatest film in Japanese cinematic history. Kurosawa's films such as *Sanjuro* (1962), *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), and *Seven Samurai* (1954), along with the more recent American film *The Last Samurai* (2003), have been very influential in shaping my view of what it means to serve alongside others in pursuit of a common cause.

Samurai/Minister as Proud Heir

In addition to their servant and warrior skills, Samurai also offer a parallel to the Christian minister with regard to their pride. Though just like the other parallels, this one was twisted by the fall and produced pride which was sinful and misplaced. The Samurai were, for better or for worse, extremely proud. “Pride in their status was a predominant characteristic of the warriors, and even the lowest among them felt and behaved like a monarch before commoners.”⁴⁰ The Samurai pride regarding status is tied closely to their servant devotion mentality. The Samurai, as noted above, saw themselves as an extension of the Daimyo. Therefore, to dishonor a Samurai was not an affront to the Samurai per se, rather it was an affront to the Daimyo they served. The Daimyo was seen as almost a father figure over the realm. As his sworn servant protectors, the Samurai realized that they were servants of their master—and as such, were due all the respect that came with such status by anyone within their master’s domain. In addition, Samurai status was hereditary—those born into Samurai families were Samurai themselves. They received a status of honor through inheritance as sons or daughters.

Of course, such pride in human masters and status has no place within the Kingdom of God; but the notion of the servant of God as proud heir to the Kingdom is one that we *do* find support for in Scripture. Recognition of such status is found at the heart of the climactic eighth chapter of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome:

The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but

⁴⁰ Ratti and Westbrook, p.113

because of Him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into *the glorious freedom of God's children*. (Romans 8:16-21, emphasis mine)

Having been brought into the family heritage of the true Daimyo, YHWH Himself, the Christian minister can be proud of such status and boast in what God has done in history to bring about such a change in the lives of His People. Those who unite themselves in service to the Lord unite themselves to the promises given to God's People from the beginning, and can therefore see themselves as proud (though undeserving in and of themselves) heirs to God's Kingdom:

“There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29)

“[The] Gentiles are co-heirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (Ephesians 3:6)

“This *Spirit* He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:6-7)

“Because God wanted to show His unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, He guaranteed it with an oath...” (Hebrews 6:17)

The Samurai were set apart from commoners by their status, were considered the possession of their Daimyo, and dedicated their lives to bringing honor and glory to the one whom they served. Peter's words to the Church provide an amazing Spiritual parallel for the servant of the True Lord of the Realm:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)

As heirs possessing a royal spiritual status, the Christian minister should, like the Samurai, keep this in mind at all times and act in such a way that reflects this truth. However, unlike the Samurai, the pride in status held by the Christian minister is to be entirely based on, and focused upon, the Lord and His mighty acts of salvation rather than any human skill, accomplishment, or pedigree.

Samurai/Minister and Gender

One final aspect of the Samurai metaphor, which has already been mentioned indirectly deserves special attention. This is the issue of Gender roles among the Samurai. Because it parallels an issue that has been controversial with regard to Christian ministry, the gender roles among Samurai provide what I believe to be useful insight into how ministers of both genders can view their call to a life of service to their Lord.

Samurai are usually thought of as men. However, there were many women who held this status as well. But though the Samurai woman served the Daimyo with the same devoted ferocity as their male counterpart, the ways in which she served took different forms. Whereas the male Samurai wielded the *katana*, wore armor, and confronted the enemy head-on in combat, the female Samurai wielded a smaller dagger-like version of the *katana* hidden in the folds of her garment, and relied on her natural beauty, grace, and elegance to defend and serve her Daimyo. The female Samurai were able to charm or seduce an enemy, manipulating him in such a way as to render him vulnerable to a sudden, close range strike. The female Samurai were every bit as skillful in wielding their weapon as the male Samurai—and often much more shrewd.

Similarly, though the majority of ministers found in Scripture are men, God can and does raise up women who are every bit as skilled, and who possess natural abilities that men often lack. Such women, if called and equipped by God, are able to carry out any task they are given by their Lord. One need look no further than the account of Deborah, to see that when called by God, women possess all the authority, ingenuity, and skills needed for such a call.⁴¹ Those who argue that women should not serve in ministry where they would have authority over any man would do well to ponder how God used Deborah—giving her not only authority over *a* man, but authority over *every* man in Israel! In the same way, the New Testament notes outstanding examples of women who were called by God—even to the office of apostle⁴², and who faithfully wielded the Sword in service of their Lord.⁴³

In addition to their physical prowess, female Samurai were every bit as devoted to their lord (as well as their lord's vassals—their husbands), as the men were. Samurai women walked boldly into the face of death with all the unflinching devotion that characterized their male counterparts. An amazing example of such willingness to lay down her life in service to, and protection of, another is that of the Kesa-gozen, the wife of an imperial guard in Kyoto during the 12th century:

“This lady was the object of another warrior’s passion and he was determined to have her. When her pursuer planned to murder her husband in his sleep, she substituted herself in her husband’s bed and allowed herself to be decapitated in his stead, thus saving her honor and her husband’s life at one and the same time.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ For the account of Deborah, as well as the shrewd action taken by another woman, Jael, in delivering Israel from the enemy, see Judges 4-5.

⁴² One such example is Junia, who Paul mentions in Rom. 16:7, as “outstanding among the apostles.”

⁴³ Paul’s prohibitions against women teaching or having authority over men in the Pastoral Epistles, in my opinion, have been exegeted inaccurately by many to enforce the notion that women are always prohibited from any ordained ministry. N.T. Wright offers an excellent look at this issue in his volume on the Pastoral Epistles in the Paul for Everyone series.

⁴⁴ Ratti and Westbrook, p.118

Kesa-gozen provides an example of the devotion and self-sacrifice to which the Christian minister should constantly aspire. **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.”** These words of Jesus’ in John 15:12-13 are for all who would follow Him as their Lord. How much more so should they be heeded by ministers of either gender who have been called to protect, serve, teach, guide, and if necessary die for those whom God has placed in their care!

Conclusion

Our Lord Jesus—our Daimyo—embodied the best qualities of the Samurai feudal Japan. He was the ultimate example of the *obedient, devoted, self-sacrificing, trained warrior* and *heir* of God’s Kingdom. At the end of His earthly sojourn, He empowered His ministers—His Samurai—to continue in His example and faithfully serve the Lord regardless of the consequences, no matter how dangerous: **“This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers”** (1 John 3:16).

As my seminary training comes to a close I have gained a clearer vision of where God has gifted me and to what role in His feudal domain—the Church—He has called me. God has called me to wield the Sword in His service—to cut down the enemy who seeks to maintain control over those whom he has in bondage (Evangelism); to defend my Daimyo’s domain at all costs and protect those within its bounds (Apologetics); and to train my fellow servants to be skillful swordsmen (Biblical Teaching and Interpretation). To me the metaphor of Minister as Samurai is a powerful and inspiring

one by which to view my call to Ministry. I believe that this metaphor can provide a much-needed level of confidence, challenge, and sense of duty to those in ministry regardless of their calling. It is my hope that this discussion will inspire others to strap on the Armor, take up the *Katana*, and walk out into the world in unflinching devotion to the One True Daimyo who's Domain is unending and everlasting! Amen.

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