

Message #11

I Timothy 3:2a

“Above Reproach”

Behind every successful invention, behind every successful organization, behind every successful operation are men who have character. Someone has said, “Character is a victory, not a gift.” Men who have character are men who make victorious character choices. They choose what is right when with others and when alone.

If ever there is a place where we need men who will develop character, it is in the church. If ever there is a time when we need men of character, it is now. Character is not an option for a leader in God’s church; it is a “must.” The man who would lead God’s church “must” have the character and quality of a faithful man of God.

IF THE CHURCH OF GOD IS TO BECOME A PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH OF GOD, IT MUST HAVE MEN AS ELDERS AND DEACONS WHO MEET THE CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS.

These character qualities are necessary and attainable. As we have already observed in previous studies, these qualities are not a reference to a man’s pre-conversion character but to his post-conversion character, when he aspires to serve.

CHARACTER QUALIFICATION #1 – The leader in God’s church must have the character and quality of being above reproach. **3:2a**

In the original Greek, there are three different words that are translated “blameless” or “above reproach”:

Word #1 - Anepilamptos (ανεπίλημτος)

This particular word is used three times in I Timothy by the Apostle Paul (3:2; 5:7; 6:14). This particular word means to be above reproach in the sense of having a good reputation that has been earned and deserved (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 36). This word is specifically used in regard to a qualification for an elder. This is the strongest word of the three, which emphasizes a deserved reputation. From these uses in I Timothy, we may conclude this status is attainable for an elder (3:2), all men and women (5:7), and by Timothy (6:14).

Word #2 - Anegklatos (ἀνέγκλητος)

This particular word is used in regard to leadership three times (I Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7). This particular word means to be above reproach in the sense of having a reputation that has been established as one that has not had to be called to account because of some reproach or reproof (*Ibid.*, p. 35).

The man who is disqualified is one who has to continually be reproved by others.

Word #3 - Amemptos (ἀμεμπτος)

This particular word is not used to qualify leadership, but it is used to describe leadership (i.e. Luke 1:6; II Sam. 22:24-26). This word is also used in reference to a lifestyle and goal of every believer (Phil. 2:15). The basic idea behind this word is to be free from fault (*Ibid.*, p. 24). Practically speaking, this word means to be living life or walking through life in such a way that no continual fault can be seen or charged against the believer.

Now collectively these words enable us to form an accurate interpretation as to what Paul had in mind when he said a man who is a leader in God's church must be "above reproach." When a man desires to be a leader in a church, he must have established for himself a good name and a good reputation that specifically says he has demonstrated a quality life of faithfulness in the church and has consistently displayed a character that cannot be called into question. Such a man has continually manifested a good solid testimony for Jesus Christ, and no valid charges of reproachful things can be leveled against him. Being blameless does not mean being sinless; it does mean having a walk and lifestyle that is the character and quality of a faithful man of God. Such a man will have legitimately earned for himself a good name when it comes to the things of God, and such a man has a right to serve as a leader in God's church.

Obviously this qualification, as with all the qualifications in this list, has nothing to do with what a man was or did prior to his conversion. I am also convinced, from a study of the Word that this qualification has little to do with what a man was or did after his conversion. The stress here is on what a man is now, when he aspires to the office of a leader in God's church. If a man has established a good name for himself as a man of God and this reputation is deserved and has been earned through a process of time, and if one sees that he is continually walking in paths of righteousness, then this man has every right to serve because he meets this qualification of being above reproach.

There are some that suggest that this qualification is an overriding qualification over all the others. For example, Richard Lenski suggests that this qualification is a general qualification, the specifics of which are named in the remaining list (Lenski, *I Timothy*, p. 579). William Hendriksen takes the same position—"above reproach" is a general term, the particulars of which follow in the following qualifying list (Hendriksen, pp. 120-121). Grammatically speaking, however, it is completely legitimate to take the qualification "above reproach" to be the first of the list, meaning it is just one of the several qualifications one must look for in an elder or deacon.

We need to carefully understand that this qualification does not mean a man has been perfectly sinless either before or after salvation. As Homer Kent said, "But it does refer to consistent, mature Christian living which gives no occasion for public reproach" (Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 121).

We may biblically demonstrate several characters in the Bible were classified as being "above reproach" after having sinned before salvation and after salvation:

(Illustration #1) - For example, the Colossians were classified as being “blameless” and “beyond reproach” in their relationship with Jesus Christ. This classification had nothing to do with the Colossians pre-conversion sins because the testimony prior to salvation was “you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds” (Col. 1:21-22).

(Illustration #2) - In the case of the Philippians, the concept of being blameless was one of continually proving that they had the power of God in their lives by the way they lived (Phil. 2:15). Paul himself admits that he hadn’t arrived to a level of sinless perfection, which obviously didn’t prevent him from being classified as blameless (Phil. 3:12-13).

(Illustration #3) - In the O.T. case of David, he is classified as being “blameless” after his sin with Bathsheba (II Sam. 22:24-26, 44; 23:1). What this tells us is that it is still possible to be classified as blameless and be a leader even after having sinned as a believer.

(Illustration #4) - In the case of Peter, he was an apostle and elder after cursing and denying the Lord publicly three times as a believer and after living a rugged and licentious lifestyle prior to becoming a believer (I Pet. 5:1; 4:3).

It is clear from these Biblical examples that being classified as one who is “above reproach” do not mean one has not sinned before salvation or after salvation. What God is after in this qualification is a man who is in the church that has established a good, consistent reputation for himself as being a faithful man of God. This means he has honestly earned a good name for himself and no valid charges of a godless lifestyle can be leveled against him. Such a man will be living his life in such a way that there is “no occasion for public reproach.” As Dr. Kent said, “His conduct should be of such a nature that no handle is given to anyone by which to injure his reputation” (Kent, p. 121). The famed theologian John Calvin observed, “There will be no one found among men that is free from every vice...but it is another thing to have a disgraceful name...” (Calvin, p. 76).

J. Vernon McGee makes a very interesting, very important and very true observation about this qualification: “The thing that must be understood is that you will be blamed for things if you hold an office, any office, in the church. What is important is that the accusation must not be true. An elder must be blameless in the sense that he will not be found guilty of anything that he might be accused of” (McGee, Vol. 5, p.441).

If you are faithful to God, you are going to be accused. Christ was accused of being a glutton, a drunk and a man who associated with terrible sinners (i.e. Luke 7:34). If accusations were leveled against Jesus Christ, we may be certain they will be leveled against leaders in Christ’s church. That is exactly why accusations against an elder are not to be quickly received (I Tim. 5:19). There will always be accusations leveled against those faithfully serving God; but the key to being “above reproach” is they are not true!

Dr. Paul Benware makes another important observation about this qualification when he says that this is a pass/fail qualification that is judged by outside investigation. In other words, we are not even in a position to determine this qualification ourselves. Even if we were to be classified as being “above reproach,” we can all still find areas of inadequacy in our own lives.

The point of this qualification is really how others see us. Other men of God look at us and give their prayerful judgment of us. If their prayerful estimation is that we have a solid testimony, a good reputation and a good name, and we are living a good quality, godly life, we then meet the prerequisite.

Any leader can find flaws in his own character, but that does not mean he is disqualified from being a leader. Paul himself, who wrote these words, didn’t even think he had arrived in his own spiritual life, so we can expect we will certainly think the same way and then some (Phil. 3:12-13).

What God is looking for in this qualification is a man who has earned for himself a good name as being a faithful man of God. Such a man will not have to be continually reprovved and rebuked for some sin. Such a man will have a lifestyle that is Biblical and true. Such a man will have discipline, dedication and diligence when it comes to the Word and work of God. This testimony will be seen by many in the church and in the local church he will be able to serve for he meets the qualification of being “above reproach.”

Are you one living “above reproach”? Is your life one that stands out as a pillar and support of God’s truth?