Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Moral Qualifications for Pastoral Ministry
Scripture: 1 Timothy 3
Code: BQ10711

"An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money." (1 Timothy 3:2–3)

Paul demands that **an overseer** in the church of Jesus Christ **must be above reproach.** The Greek particle *de* (**must**) emphasizes that this is an absolute necessity. A life without blame is the over arching requirement for leadership in the church.

Anepilemptos (**above reproach**) means "not able to be held." The man who is above reproach cannot be arrested and held as if he were a criminal; there is nothing for which to accuse him. In Titus 1:6, the same idea of being above reproach is conveyed, but a different term (*anengkletos* —"unreprovable") is used. The present participle *einai* (**be**) indicates he is in a present state of being above reproach. Obviously, it does not mean he has not committed sins in his life. What it does mean is that his life has not been marred by some obvious sinful defect in character which would preclude him setting the highest standard for godly conduct. He must be a model for the congregation to follow (cf. Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9; Heb. 13:7; 1 Peter 5:3). He also must not give the enemies of the church reason to attack its reputation.

Pastors must take great care to remain above reproach for several reasons. First, they are the special targets of Satan, and he will assault them with more severe temptation than others. Those on the front lines of the spiritual battle will bear the brunt of satanic opposition.

Second, their fall has a greater potential for harm. Satan knows that when a shepherd falls, the effect on the sheep is devastating.

Third, leaders' greater knowledge of the truth, and accountability to live it, brings greater chastening when they sin.

Fourth, elders' sins are more hypocritical than others' because they preach against the very sins they commit.

Leaders need an abundance of God's grace and power because of their greater responsibility and visibility.

To protect themselves leaders must spend indepth time in the study of God's Word. They must be "constantly nourished on the words of the faith [Scripture] and of the sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6). The psalmist wrote, "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps. 119:11). A leader must continuously expose his life to the light of the Word of God. He must also be a man of prayer, and be accountable to others in spiritual fellowship.

The church is called to be committed to maintaining leadership that is godly. The church is responsible to measure men by the standard of **above reproach.** The all too common practice today is to forgive a leader who sins and immediately restore him to his ministry. The church, like God, must not hesitate to forgive those who truly repent. To immediately restore them to the ministry, however, lowers the standard that God expects leaders to follow. And since leaders serve as the pattern of holiness and virtue for the congregation, the standard for the entire church is lowered.

In 3:2–7, Paul lists four areas in which a man aspiring to church leadership may be evaluated as to whether he is **above reproach.** These have to do with his moral character, home life, spiritual maturity, and public reputation.

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