

The Blameless Pastor

Why "blameless" in First Timothy 3:2 is the greatest character trait for the pastorate.



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INTRODUCTION

The book of First Timothy was written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, his "son in the faith" (1:2). Paul left Timothy in Ephesus so that Timothy could deal with false teachers (1 Timothy 1:3). In time, Paul began instructing Timothy on how to conduct worship in the church. He asked him to appoint elders so that the elders could lead the church in his absence. So Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy is to instruct him on how to conduct worship in the church (1 Timothy 3:15).

The third chapter comprises the qualifications of the elders and deacons. Elders can be called pastors or bishops. These words are used interchangeably to refer to the same office from different perspectives. The apostle began by giving us the qualifications of the pastor and lastly dealt with those of the deacon. While most of these qualifications overlap, the deacon does not need to have the ability to teach. The aim of this paper is to define the word blameless and to prove that this character trait mothers all the other requirements listed therein. Does blameless mean sinless perfection? Does it promote legalism? Can a sinner ever be found blameless?

DEFINITION OF THE WORD "BLAMELESS"

When we hear the word "blameless" it is tempting to think that it refers to one who has no sin. This is not true because this would mean that we can be saved apart from Christ. The gospel would be altered if we allow such a definition to prevail. First John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." This cuts away at perfectionism. For us to get to the root of this we must first find the correct definition of the word blameless. What is it then?

Blameless as defined in Strong's dictionary: "The Greek root word is *anepilempton* which can be defined as irreproachable, or faultless."¹ The Webster's dictionary says of blamelessness: "without fault, innocent, guiltless or not meriting censure."² This does not mean that the said person cannot and will not sin but that he is not characterized by sin. The most concise definition

¹ Strong's Dictionary, *Electronic Programme*, (e-sword).

² Webster's Dictionary, *Electronic Programme*, (e-sword).

for blamelessness is “a man of character whereby accusations do not stick to him.”³ The above definition rules out perfectionism and advocates a life that is not marked by sin. If an accusation is leveled against the person, he and the people around him can defend him because his track record is straight.

It is interesting as highlighted by *The Walvoord Bible Knowledge Commentary* that “the Greek word *anepilempton* is only found in this epistle in the New Testament. This word means above reproach.”⁴ *Anenkletos* is a synonym for *anepilempton*. “This word signifies that which cannot be called to account or with nothing laid to one’s charge as a result of public investigation.”⁵ This word is used in Col. 1:22 and is translated blameless.

TWO REASONS “BLAMELESS” IS IMPORTANT

First, it is necessary for church discipline. The church will not want to be led by someone whose weaknesses are obvious. In church discipline the “spiritual brother should restore the sinning brother” (Gal. 6:1). If then the pastor is reproachable, his counsel will be despised when he attempts to discipline a sinning brother. He has to be an example to the less spiritual brother rather than a laughing stock.

Second, it is necessary for evangelism. If the pastor has a bad testimony that is so clear, notable even by unbelievers, it is not surprising to hear them despise the faith on account of him. Lot is a Biblical example of a person who lacked this qualification. When he was in Sodom, he failed to convince his son-in-laws to flee with him. They thought him to be crazy because his words were not representative of character. Lot’s association with the Sodomites was enough to condemn him. Everyone, Christian or non-Christian, would be confused as to why a true believer would meddle in the sinful affairs of this world. Lot was among the council of rulers of Sodom and this means that he was, as a leader, involved in the folly of the Sodomites (Genesis 19:1). John Philips observed, “In chapter 19 Lot is found sitting in the gate of Sodom. He had risen in the world. He probably had become one of Sodom’s high-ranking officials, a member of its legislature no less, charged with up-holding its principles and protecting the folly of its people. What a place for a professing believer!”⁶

The possession of alcoholic in his home leaves a lot to be desired. Why would someone who does not drink beer keep its raw materials in his home? Even if he was not a drunkard it

³ Paul Schlelein, *Pastoral Theology Course Syllabus*, 33.

⁴ John F Walvoord, *The Walvoord Bible Commentary* (Dallas: Victor Books, 1983), 736.

⁵ W.E.Vine, *Expository Dictionary* (New Jersey: Revell, 1940), 130-131.

⁶ John Philips, *Exploring Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 159.

would be hard for him to defend himself if this charge would be brought on him. He ensnared himself and ultimately fell because of it. We can observe from the story of Lot that being blameful does not always follow that one is not saved. The Bible in Second Peter 2:7 tells us that Lot was saved, though a lifestyle like his would prohibit today's Christian from leadership roles in the church. This, however, should not make a Christian relax because it might also reflect that you were never saved in the first place. Our assurance should proceed from our works.

CONTEXT IN REVIEW

The apostle Paul mentioned this character trait first because all other traits are sub-points to this one. There is one main point and fifteen smaller points under it. If someone is polygamous or is known for having extra marital relationships, he cannot be said to be above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2). The sin of adultery will stick to him if leveled. An example of a man above reproach is "a husband of one wife" which literally means "a one woman man." A blameless man will not be violent (1 Tim. 3:3), nor his thinking be clouded (1 Tim. 3:2). Verse 4 says that he must rule his household well. A faithful man—one who is ultimately blameless, can only do this. Lenski points out, "Irreproachable is general: 'not to be taken hold of' i.e. of such a character that no one can rightfully take hold of the person with a charge of unfitness, the following items list the points that need to be considered."⁷

EXAMPLES OF BLAMELESS MEN

The Bible has a great number of people who were blameless, but still sinners. One example of such is Barnabas. He is described as the "son of consolation" in Acts 9:27. In this passage Barnabas went with Paul to the apostles to explain to them how Paul had been converted. The apostles believed Barnabas because he was above reproach. The apostles sent him again to Antioch where he encouraged them and a great many were added to the faith because of his testimony (Acts 11:22-24). In verse 24 of the same chapter it is said that Barnabas was a "good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." When famine was predicted by the prophet Abagus, Barnabas and Paul were sent with food relief (Acts 11:30). The church at Antioch did not hesitate to send him with material things because he was of good reputation. In 13:1 we learn that he was a teaching elder of the church at Antioch. He went with Paul to the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. If this man had spots and blemishes in his life they would not have given him a position of authority in the church.

⁷ R.C.H.Lenski, *Interpretations of Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Minnesota: Augsburg, 1961), 579.

CONCLUSION

As believers we must all strive to be blameless so that we can testify the goodness of Christ to the lost world. Jesus says, "Be holy for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). We must be the salt of the earth, and our salt must not lose its flavor because if it does it becomes good for nothing (Matt. 5:13). Lenski observed, "It has been remarked that all of these save the ability to teach and that of not being a novice or a beginner in the faith, are requirements that apply to all Christians, which is quite true and shows that, as far as morals are concerned, the New Testament has only one standard for both the clergy and the laity and not two"⁸

Being blameless does not teach perfectionism. Rather, accusations will not stick because his life is not characterized by sin. A sinner can therefore be found blameless because his life is not marked with sin. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:11 that all people are sinful, however it again calls the same beings to be blameless, meaning these depraved humans can be above reproach. This character nurtures the other traits in the list of the requirement to the office of the elder in the church. If one is blameless, is apt to teach and is not a novice, he is qualified to be a pastor because blamelessness is umbrella to all the other requirements.

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⁸ Lenski, *Interpretations of Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 579.