



CAPITOL  
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MAY 15, 2023

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# How to Be Above Reproach in Office



**W**hen I first taught this Bible study at the U.S. Senate Member Bible Study, one senator quickly brought up the fact that political leaders are in an industry where millions of dollars are spent on opposition research with the intent of destroying their reputations—and that this very moment some people are in some basement somewhere trying to come up with ways to attack their credibility!

That is a sobering thought, and unfortunately in American politics today, it is a verifiable reality.

*Continued next page*

- CURRENT AND FORMER GOVERNORS**  
 Mike Dunleavy **AK**  
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 Rick Perry **TX**  
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 Brandon Williams **NY**  
 Roger Williams **TX**  
 Joe Wilson **SC**  
 Rob Wittman **VA**  
 Steve Womack **AR**  
 Rudy Yakym **IN**  
 Ted Yoho **FL**

**WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES**

- Governors:** Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom  
**Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff:** Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom  
**Senate Members:** Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served  
**House Members:** Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Rm., Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served

*The views expressed in each Bible Study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study sponsor.*



PUBLIC SERVANT  
ENDORSEMENT

**Steve Daines**

*U.S. Senator, Montana*



How then does a political leader best live above reproach when serving in public office? What does the Word of God teach us about this subject? Should a sitting elected official live every day in anxiety, worrying about people in basements who are plotting to spin information to damage their opponents? Let's search the Scriptures on this matter and see what God has for us.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

“It is very beneficial for lawmakers to be involved in a serious Bible study. We should look to the Bible for examples of leaders. In fact, when Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel spoke to a joint session of Congress he looked up from the speaker's rostrum and saw Moses staring down at him. Here is the face of Moses who provided the law.

“Capitol Ministries Bible study has been very helpful to me personally. I enjoy the accountability of a weekly study that keeps us in the Word, as well as the interaction and fellowship with other members which is a real encouragement.”

### **I. ABOVE REPROACH: A NECESSITY IN STATE LEADERSHIP?**

After the Apostle Paul installs Timothy as the senior pastor at the Church in Ephesus, he instructs Timothy as to whom he ought to promote to Church leadership (1 Timothy 3:2, cf. 1 Timothy 3:15). Paul lists 14 emphatic characteristics (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7) that Timothy *must* consider. First on the list is someone who is *above reproach*. In verse 7, Paul concludes with the same directive. Note this in these two respective passages:

*An overseer, then, must be above reproach...* (1 Timothy 3:2).

*And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church...* (1 Timothy 3:7).

Being a person who is *above reproach* is something *he must be*, and *he must have a good reputation*, these texts state respectively. The underlying Greek word is *anepileptos*, which was used in the Hellenistic court of law at the time of Paul's writing and literally meant, “not able to be held.” “The accused was found to be *anepileptos*” is to say he couldn't be held as a criminal. The idea is that in a public setting of a scandalous charge, the accused would be found innocent; the claims would be found meritless.

To clarify Paul's word choice, he is not saying a person *must be* perfect in order to lead in the institution of the Church; he does not say, “An overseer, then, must be perfect.” *For all have sinned...* states Romans 3:23 (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:20). We all—even pastors—have our struggles with our sin-laden, fallen, old fleshly nature, even post-salvation!



What Paul is saying is the Rubicon for spiritual leadership, i.e., the line of demarcation for those qualified to lead versus those who are not is determined by this: does personal sin rise to the level of a public scandal? All are to check sin at the door, so to speak, and never give in to sin, especially to the point it becomes a public scandal. And if we fail in that regard, Scripture tells us we are not fit to lead. A church leader cannot be guilty of a public scandal and have any sense of moral authority.

**John Calvin, commenting on this passage, put it this way regarding his understanding of *anepileptos*: “[He is not someone who is] tainted with disgrace that detracts from his authority.”<sup>1</sup>**

Paul uses the Greek participle *de* to indicate that this overarching characteristic is not negotiable as it relates to eligibility for Church leadership. *He must be* Paul states under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Notice as stated above, Paul concludes his litmus test of 14 necessary characteristics by stating again at the close: *he must have a good reputation with those outside the church*. Although using a different Greek word, *marturia*, in this instance, that is translated into the English word “reputation,” the idea is identical; stating this twice underscores its significance.

Apparent from chapter one of 1 Timothy, Timothy was inheriting a difficult situation where Hymenaeus and Alexander had commandeered the church and led it astray. They were not men

who were *above reproach*, as indicated by Paul’s comments in and throughout the first chapter. Paul is now saying in essence, “Okay, I’ve gotten rid of those guys who were here before you, Timothy, so going forward, don’t make that same mistake on your watch!”

Paul’s doubling down on this leadership necessity did not catch Timothy by surprise. Acts 16:2 describes him as a man of a *good reputation*. In this passage Paul first meets Timothy and brings him along on his missionary journeys:

*and he [Timothy] was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2).*

Timothy was already *well spoken of* when Paul first met him! The same standard Paul was searching for and found in Timothy he now insists Timothy look for in others. It follows that Paul will later say to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*. Therein is the same timeless leadership principle: Timothy was *well spoken of*; Paul insists present leaders be *well spoken of*, and present leaders should be on the lookout for others who are *well spoken of*. It follows that the criteria of being *well spoken of* and being *above reproach* today are things God would have us be super cognizant of when determining the suitability of a person for leadership.

Several decades had passed between Paul’s meeting Timothy and his installa-

VERSE OF THE WEEK



**Proverbs 3:1–4**

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.*



Focus on your relationship with Christ; habitually study, memorize, meditate, and apply His Word in and to your life.



Oliver Wolcott



tion into Church leadership. It is safe to conclude that Timothy had remained *faithful* and maintained a *good reputation* over those two decades. Paul saw a consistency, a track record which led to his *entrusting* Timothy and putting him in charge.

**With the viability and sustainability of the institution in jeopardy—with that all up for grabs—Paul deems a leader’s being *above reproach* as one of the most important considerations.**

Earlier, this determinant for leadership is also illustrated in and by the selection of leaders in the church at Jerusalem. After certain out-of-town Hellenistic Christians were treated with partiality by Palestinian Christians when food was served, the leaders of the church decided it was time to select better food servers. Note Acts 6:3 in this regard, and what they were looking for in choosing new deacons:

*Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.*

Again, the determining criterion for selecting leaders was whether someone possessed a *good reputation*. In Galatians 2:9 Paul echoes this same ideal:

*and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we*

*might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*

Notice what Paul is saying. The ones vested with and in leadership at the church of Galatia were *James and Cephas and John*, of whom it was said that they *were reputed to be pillars*. They were the leaders who decided to give Barnabas to Paul so that Paul would have a traveling companion on his upcoming missionary journey.

In a broader sense, in Philippians 2:15b Paul said to the whole church, not just those who would lead:

*Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.*

These passages serve to illustrate the importance of having a *good reputation* both vividly and repeatedly as it pertains to whether someone is qualified to be a *pillar* in the work of God throughout the world.

But what about leadership in the State? Is the same also true in that institution? We often hear well-meaning people say something like (perhaps in their attempt to justify a lesser standard) “We are electing a President, not a pastor.” But as we will now see, this point of view is not biblical.

### II. ABOVE REPROACH: PARALLELS IN PROVERBS

Whereas the New Testament books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are written

“Through various scenes of life, God has sustained me. May He ever be my unfailing friend; may His love cherish my soul; may my heart with gratitude acknowledge His goodness; and may my desires be to Him and to the remembrance of His name.... May a happiness be granted to those I most tenderly love, which shall continue and increase through an endless existence. Your cares and burdens must be many and great, but put your trust in that God Who has hitherto supported you and me; He will not fail to take care of those who put their trust in Him....It is most evident that this land is under the protection of the Almighty, and that we shall be saved not by our wisdom nor by our might, but by the Lord of Host Who is wonderful in counsel and Almighty in all His operations.”

— Oliver Wolcott, signer of the Declaration of Independence, military general, governor of Connecticut.

*Letters of Delegates to Congress: January 1, 1776-May 15, 1776*, Paul H. Smith, editor (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1978), Vol. 3, 502–503, Oliver Wolcott to Laura Wolcott on April 10, 1776.



Samuel Adams

in part as to how to ascertain if someone is qualified to lead in God's institution of the Church, these books are known as the Pastoral Epistles. In the Old Testament book of Proverbs, Solomon is instructing his son, Rehoboam, in principles for effective State leadership. Notice the following parallel passages to 1 Timothy 3:2 and 7, pertaining to the necessity of a *good reputation* to lead in the State as well:

*So you will find favor and a good repute in the sight of God and man* (Proverbs 3:4).

*A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold* (Proverbs 22:1).

To the opposite, those who are not qualified to lead in the State are in view in Malachi 2:9:

*“So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.”<sup>2</sup>*

The parallels between the Pastorals and Proverbs are quite evident: having a *good reputation* is a prerequisite for effective leadership in *both* institutions.

Why then is being *above reproach*—being a man or woman of integrity and proven character—so critical to institutional leadership, be it in the Church or the State? The Bible says upright leadership is necessary for the sake of the example that is to be set and must be set for those who follow the institutional leader. How can a man or woman be credible and have an impact on their

community, state, or nation if they don't have a *good reputation*?

The standard of an exemplary life is necessary for effective leadership in every institution.

### III. BEING ABOVE REPROACH EQUATES TO EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

Numerous Scripture passages indicate the importance of example—and how a person should lead by example in both the Church and the State:

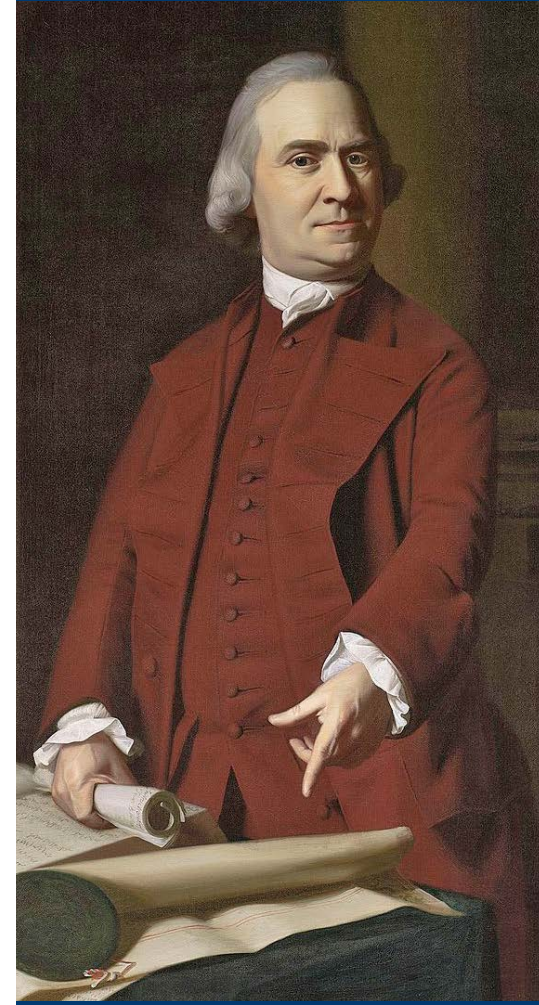
*Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us* (Philippians 3:17).

*Not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example* (2 Thessalonians 3:9).

*Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith* (Hebrews 13:7).

*Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock* (1 Peter 5:3).

It's a simple but profound point: those who have bad *reputations* cannot lead by example. One commentator on the importance of role model leadership in the Church (which can be applied to the importance of role model leadership in the State) writes:



“The name of the Lord (says the Scripture) is a strong tower; thither the righteous flee and are safe [Proverbs 18:10]. Let us secure His favor and He will lead us through the journey of this life and at length receive us to a better.”

— Samuel Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence, “Father of the American Revolution,” ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, governor of Massachusetts.

*Letters of Delegates to Congress: August 16, 1776-December 31, 1776*, Paul H. Smith, editor (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1979), Vol. 5, 669–670, Samuel Adams to Elizabeth Adams on December 26, 1776.



William Samuel Johnson



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 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.<sup>3</sup>

The power of the Word of God—if studied in a disciplined manner as a habit of one’s life, i.e., if you are *constantly nourished on the words of the faith*—will serve to empower your life. Why and how is that? States Hebrews 4:12 more specifically in this regard:

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

The power of the Word of God can keep your life on track and lead to *a good reputation*—one that has no public scandals.

In fact, living a life in constant communion with God through His Word is a matter of obedience. States Colossians 3:16a:

*Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you.*

This passage does not begin, “Think about sometime in the future letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” The Psalmist informs us to the contrary. Doing so now equates to the following that leads to *a good reputation*:

*Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You* (Psalm 119:11).

Notice the inspired-by-God insight that Paul shares in this regard in order to encourage Timothy to do likewise:

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He consid-*

**It follows that being *above reproach* is an indispensable quality—it is mandatory—in order to be exemplary and thereby effective in leadership in a fallen world that is too often characterized and overwhelmed by its predilection for sin and evil.**

**IV. ABOVE REPROACH: HOW DO YOU ATTAIN AND MAINTAIN IT?**

Paul addresses that question with Timothy in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy:

*In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following* (1 Timothy 4:6).

“[I] ... am endeavoring ... to attend to my own duty only as a Christian.... let us take care that our Christianity, though put to the test ... be not shaken, and that our love for things really good wax not cold.”

— William Samuel Johnson, signer of the U.S. Constitution, member of the Continental Congress, judge, framer of the Bill of Rights, president of Columbia College, U.S. senator.

Edwards Beardsley, *Life and Times of William Samuel Johnson* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1886), 184.



*ered me faithful, putting me into service* (1 Timothy 1:12).

If you desire Christ to *strengthen* you, then be faithful to and consistent in His Word!

## V. SUMMARY

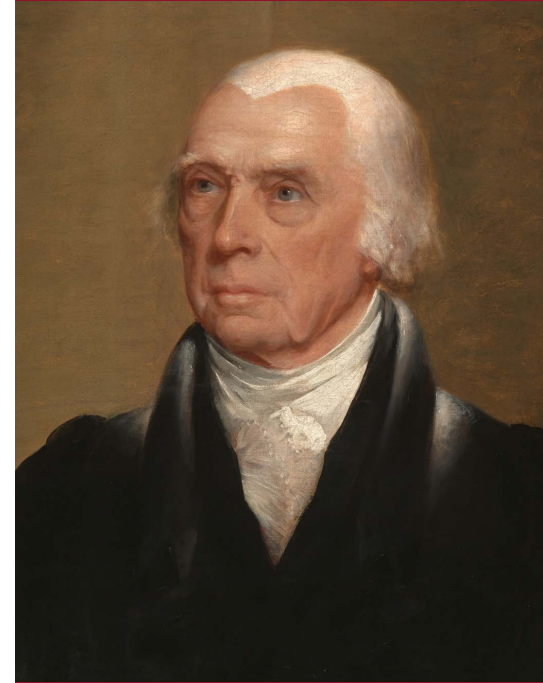
Proverbs 3:1-4 is an apt summary of how to live a life *above reproach* in office. Notice that having *a good reputation* is a result of obeying the first verses—and then the promise of *a good reputation* results per verse 4:

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write*

*them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.*

*So you will find favor and good repute* does not come from seeking a good reputation. It is resultant from walking closely with God; it is both the immediate and eventual results when we *comply* with His *commandments*! Coach Wooden used to always say, “Work on your character, not your reputation.” I think he got that advice from these four Proverbs! Focus on your relationship with Christ; habitually study, memorize, meditate, and apply His Word in and to your life. Then He will take care of achieving your *good reputation*. In addition, be committed to weekly Bible study with colleagues to be strengthened by one another and have a sense of accountability versus autonomy.

James Madison



“I have sometimes thought there could not be a stronger testimony in favor of religion or against temporal enjoyments, even the most rational and manly, than for men who occupy the most honorable and gainful departments and [who] are rising in reputation and wealth, publicly to declare their unsatisfactoriness by becoming fervent advocates in the cause of Christ; and I wish you may give in your evidence in this way.”

— James Madison, signer of the Constitution, author of *The Federalist Papers*, framer of the Bill of Rights, secretary of state, fourth president of the United States.

James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison*, William T. Hutchinson, editor (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Vol. I, 96, to William Bradford on September 25, 1773.



*Making Disciples  
of Jesus Christ  
in the Political Arena  
Throughout the World*



Capitol Ministries provides Bible studies, evangelism, and discipleship to political leaders. Founded in 1996, we have started ongoing ministries in over forty U.S. state Capitols and dozens of foreign federal Capitols.

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*Lusaka* Zambia  
*Harare* Zimbabwe

1. An example of a pastor's *not* being above reproach—*anepilemtos*—in a public sense could be illustrated in many ways. Obviously sexual scandal comes to mind and is often in view here. But it could be other matters that rise to a public level that disqualify him. For example, the pastor may also be the president of a Christian college, and that college loses its accreditation when an impartial accreditation committee composed of other objective pastors finds the president to be guilty of nepotism in hiring decisions and bullying in terms of his leadership. Another example could be a pastor who excommunicates a woman from his church who would not submit to her husband (the husband being on the staff of the church) even though a civil court of law finds the husband to be guilty of child molestation. Given that the above illustrations rise to the level of a public scandal, Paul would say that pastor is not **above reproach**, i.e., qualified for spiritual leadership, by his use of his word *anepilemtos* in this passage.
2. It is an interesting aside to note the parallel indicator of someone who is lacking in reputation being in the sin of partiality as revealed in both Acts 6 and Malachi 2. Note that the two aforementioned illustrations I used as examples of *anepilemtos* have as their root the sin of partiality. It follows that the root sin of partiality is an oft-progenitor of later, if not immediate, public scandal.
3. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 103-04.