

An Elder Must be Blameless—1 Timothy 3:2

All believers will be blameless in heaven when they receive the glorified body from God at His Second Coming. But God wants His elders and pastors to be blameless today! To be “blameless” does not mean “to be perfect”. If perfection is the meaning, then they would have to be without sin on this earth. That is impossible. All believers still sin on this earth, in thought, motive and action. This word “blameless” is different from the one used in 1Tim. 3:10. Both are translated as blameless but each has a slightly different meaning.

The word “blameless” in 1Tim 3:10 (*Greek, "anegkletos"*) means “that cannot be called to account, unprovable, unaccused.” [**Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, translated, revised and enlarged by Joseph Henry Thayer, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962, fifth printing 1966), page 44.]

As Jamieson Fausset-Brown explained, it refers to a person who is blameless “as the result of public investigation, unaccused.” [**Jamieson Fausset-Brown Commentary**, Swordsearcher, 6.2] He is a man without a criminal record. The scrutiny is with reference to the fact that he is a law abiding person. This is the domain of the standard of blamelessness that is expected of the deacons and deaconesses.

The word “blameless” in 1 Tim 3:2, (*Greek, "anepileptos"*), it refers to a person who is “not apprehended, that cannot be laid hold of; hence that cannot be reprehended, not open to censure, irrefragable.” [Joseph Henry Thayer, page 44].

Adam Clarke rightly comments that he is “a person against whom no evil can be proved; one who is everywhere invulnerable; for the word is a metaphor, taken from the case of an expert and skillful pugilist, who so defends every part of his body that it is impossible for his antagonist to give one hit. So this Christian bishop is one that has so conducted himself, as to put it out of the reach of any person to prove that he is either unsound in a single article of the Christian faith, or deficient in the fulfillment of any duty incumbent on a Christian. He must be irreprehensible; for how can he reprove that in others which they can reprove in him?” [**Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible**, Swordsearcher, 6.2]

Barnes adds correctly, “The word here used does not mean that, as a necessary qualification for office, a bishop should be *perfect*; but that he should be a man against whom no charge of immorality, or of holding false doctrine, is alleged. His conduct should be irreprehensible or irrefragable. Undoubtedly it means that if any charge could be brought against him implying moral obliquity, he is not fit for the office, he should be a man of irrefragable character for truth, honesty, chastity, and general uprightness.” [**Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible**, Swordsearcher, 6.2]

We can see then that the spiritual demands on the office of the bishop or elder are far more stringent than that for a deacon. He is one whom his adversary will not be able to find any fault with even when his life is scrutinized from inside out. He must be above board in all areas of his life. This is the life of the believer and not before. Before his conversion he might have been a persecutor of believers or have committed sins like fornication and adultery. This is not to say that these sins do not matter. These are heinous sins and ought to be openly rebuked as wrong. The context here is on the qualifications of an elder. He and other leaders in that local church already had these qualifications before they were considered or nominated. The issue here is one of after salvation and not before. These sins do not disqualify him from becoming a Christian as these are the sins that caused Christ to die on the cross. But these sins committed

by a believer disqualify him from serving as a bishop in God's church. And when these sins are committed while he is serving as a bishop, it will disqualify him permanently because he has brought great shame to the highest office that God has given to His local churches. It is not about forgiveness. He will be forgiven by all parties concerned including his wife and family and fellow elders and even the church as a whole after confession and going through counseling and help. But we must not confuse forgiveness with protecting the integrity and dignity of the high office of a bishop as set forth by God in His holy Word. As long as a person says that he is a believer he will be judged as a believer. His conduct will be measured against the standard of God's Word. This is not a denominational distinctive of the Bible Presbyterian Church; these are the standards and requirements of God and not man or any church institution. They are not negotiable. When the Bible says that the bishop must be blameless, it means he has to be blameless.

This word "blameless" would cover the entire list of qualifications mentioned from verses 2 to 7. This list is spiritual in nature. Not a word is mentioned that the person should be rich, well educated, or of royal blood or a dignitary in society. These external "qualifications" used by the world to measure success are useless in the evaluation of a person's suitability for eldership. Any church that uses a person's position in the world as part of the criteria brings worldliness in to the church and will surely destroy the church. Leaders with these worldly "criteria" will make spiritual decisions with a carnal mind. A carnal mind is corrupt and soaked in sin. It is controlled by the standards of the world which has Satan as ruler of these standards. When such individuals are brought into the leadership of God's church with these criteria as the basis, it is like appointing Satan to do God's work. We do not need to go far to see the destructive impact and results of such foolish criteria on churches today. We are surrounded by them. These men will couch their language with Christian jargon to give them acceptability but the basis and foundation of their decisions is of the flesh. However, we must beware of the other extreme. Just because a person has a good education or wealth does not mean that he is disqualified altogether. Note that the reasoning here is that these worldly and material standards must not be taken into consideration when he is being considered as a bishop. It has to be completely ignored but it is not to be used against or for him.

These qualifications listed here in 1 Timothy describe the character and spiritual standing of the person before God and his walk with God. They are all spiritual in nature. Not one of them is carnal or material. That which pertains to his household and life outside of the church reveals his witness and testimony. They are important because if a person is only godly in the church and not in the home or in the firm or office where he works, then he is a hypocrite and definitely not spiritual. He could even be a wolf in sheep's clothing sent by the evil one to destroy the church! The standard of blamelessness is set forth by God to cover all areas of the life of the believer who is being considered for the office of bishop. To side-step these qualifications or to reduce them in the slightest will spell doom and destruction for God's church.

The reason is that the two words before "blameless" are "must be" (Greek—"dei einai"). It is therefore not an option but a strong insistence from God's Holy Word that the elder must be beyond reproach in every aspect of his life, both inside and outside the church.

This list of fifteen spiritual qualifications was given to the church by God to certify that the men who become under-shepherds of the flock of God would be of the highest spiritual caliber. All elders must have all fifteen qualifications. For example, if a man has all fourteen qualifications but he is afraid of his wife, he cannot be an elder. Or, if he lacks the ability to teach God's Word, then he would also be disqualified. To shorten the list of spiritual

qualifications would hurt the church of God. The lowering of the spiritual qualifications for elders has seen the death of many churches in the past as well as in the present. The yardstick has been set by God Himself and no one has the right to lower it or change it. What is a church? The apostle Paul summed it up very well when he spoke to the elders of the church in Ephesus before his imprisonment in Rome. **Acts 20:17-30** (KJV), "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. **18** And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, **19** Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: **20** And how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, **21** Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. **22** And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: **23** Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. **24** But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. **25** And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. **26** Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. **27** For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. **28** Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. **29** For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. **30** Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." [Emphasis added]

We are in the last days of our existence on earth and the necessity to maintain the highest standard for the highest office in God's church must be maintained in order to have a healthy leadership to bring forth a healthy church. "Like people, like priests!" was the dictum in OT times when Israel came under the judgement of God. When the priests and leaders were idolatrous, the people were idolatrous. When the leaders and priests were godly, the people were godly. It is the same today. When the leaders in the church are godly, the people are godly. When the leaders are carnal, the people in the church will be carnal. Spiritual members will leave a church with carnal leaders and only carnal members will remain. If they do not leave, they will eventually become carnal like their leaders. When the leaders are godly, godly members will remain. Carnal members who remain can become godly if they come under the sound teaching of God's holy and perfect Word. The kind of church we want depends on the leaders we have.

For the sake of our children and their children, as well as God's glory, God's people in Calvary Pandan must elect only leaders who possess the spiritual qualifications revealed very clearly for us in the Bible. Leaders are the foundations of every sound and biblical church. This standard of blamelessness must be found in all elders. To forsake or lower this standard is not only foolish but deadly. Churches have died because carnal pastors and elders have been allowed to play church by their worldly philosophies in managing God's church. Years of faithful building can be destroyed by one term of godless and carnal leaders. Self-declared weekly day off whereby the pastor is un-contactable is carnal. Christ as the good Shepherd is always available for His flock. Pastors who only "preach" God's Word and do not care for the "administration" of the church is another popular and carnal way of running the church.

The pastor is supposed to possess the most spiritual mind and he must be involved in all the decisions of the church. That is why he is made the ex-officio of all the ministries on the

church as stated in our Church Constitution. As the spiritual leader with theological training, he is the most spiritually qualified (at least on paper) to care for the whole church. This demarcation is man-made and will swiftly turn the church into a worldly organization that may be run with clockwork precision in terms of efficiency but is devoid of heart and soul and spiritual life. Did you know that this “tying the hands” and limiting the involvement of the pastor was once proposed by an ex-elder in Calvary Pandan’s leadership? Thank God that he failed. If the proposal had been adopted, it would have redefined the role of the pastor and destroyed the church! Carnal leaders spawn and breed carnal churches. [Bear in mind that the church is not the bricks and mortar but the people of God redeemed by Christ's precious blood.]