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FOCUSED ON THE WORD

How to Be Above Reproach in Office



One stark reality of offering yourself as a candidate for office in the United States is that political leaders are in an industry where millions of dollars are spent on opposition research with the intent of destroying your reputation—and at this very moment some people are in some basement somewhere trying to come up with ways to attack your credibility!

That is a sobering, verifiable thought.

How then does a political leader best live above reproach when serving in public office? What does the Word of

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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.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

White House Cabinet and Governors: Wednesdays 8am (EST), light breakfast served

Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served

House Members: Thursdays 8am, Natural Resources, Longworth 1334, hot breakfast served



PUBLIC SERVANT PROFILE

Congressman Pat Harrigan: “I Protect That Time Because It’s So Impactful in My Life”



When U.S. Congressman Pat Harrigan (R–North Carolina, 10th District) arrived on Capitol Hill as a freshman member of Congress in 2025, one commitment quickly became non-negotiable on his calendar—the weekly Capitol Ministries House Members Bible Study.

“It is the one thing that I don’t let my team schedule over every week,” Harrigan said. “They know if something is happening Thursday at 8:00 a.m., they automatically say no. They

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How to Be Above Reproach in Office

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, friend.

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 (see also 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 lev-



el 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.”¹**

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 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 Timothy himself 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* continue to be God’s requirement when determining the suitability of a person for leadership today.

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

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.



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don't even need to talk to me. I protect that time because it's so impactful for me in my life."

A former Green Beret and successful businessman, Harrigan has participated in many Bible studies throughout his military and professional career. Yet he says Capitol Ministries provides something distinctive.

"What is really special about Capitol Ministries is that it really is a deep dive into Scripture," he explained. "Some Bible studies that I've been a part of really lack structure. This one absolutely does not. It's challenging. It's intellectually in-depth, and it's very serious."

For Harrigan, the weekly study is more than another meeting—it is an opportunity to step back from the pressures of governing and refocus on God's eternal perspective.

"It allows you to zoom out to the 300,000-foot picture of life and see things in the light of a greater perspective," he said. "It's a great mid- to end-of-the-week reset that really serves to focus your perspective and your efforts for the rest of the week."

One of the greatest surprises for the freshman Congressman was discovering the scope of Capitol Ministries' outreach.

Continued on next page

stallation 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 with the charge of the Ephesian congregation.

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 Jerusalem 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 Gala-

tians 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 2:15 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

The New Testament books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus were written in part to instruct how to ascertain if a man is qualified to lead in God's institution of the Church; because of that 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."*²²

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 elected leaders 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:

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"The fact that there's an intentional ministry set up not just for Congress, but also for the Senate, the Cabinet, and state and local governments is remarkable. Now Capitol Ministries is expanding all around the world."



As the interview concluded, Congressman Harrigan expressed heartfelt appreciation to the faithful supporters whose prayers and generosity make the ministry possible.

"I'd ask that you thank everybody who supports the ministry. You have some incredible people involved in it, and that bleeds through to be a massive blessing for us up here."



MINISTRY LEADER PROFILE

José Villanueva

Ministry Leader, Colombia



Pastor José María Villanueva, ministry leader to national leaders in the South America nation of Colombia, was drawn to Capitol Ministries because he believes people in eminence, whether at the national or local level, need to have a biblical worldview.

“They need the principles of the Word for their personal and family life, but also in their government work—their political and their leadership work,” he said. “That is why Capitol Ministries’ Bible studies are so important.” As our ministry leader to national leaders in Colombia, Pastor Villanueva is teaching a weekly Bible study to Parliamentarians as well as spearheading efforts to establish ministries in Colombia’s 32 state Capitols. He is in ministry with his teammate wife, Clara. A former parliamentarian, Pastor Villanueva is well respected,

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.³

**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).

The power of the Word of God—if studied in a disciplined manner as a habit of your life, that is, 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 3:16:

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 considered 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.” It’s likely 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.

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esteemed, and well known in Colombia’s faith and political communities. As a member of a Christian party, in 2002, he was elected to the Parliament as a senator. Among his legislative work, Pastor Villanueva was responsible for structuring a design for Colombia in keeping with God’s principles and His Word. In 2014, working with men and women with the same dream, a political movement began that was constituted in 2018. Through this movement, several legislators and city office holders with biblical worldviews were elected. He has also guided several public servants and disciplined them in God’s Word. Those men continue to serve God and the nation. Pastor Villanueva has preached in Colombia and in many other nations. He has served as senior pastor of the Global Family Church based in Bogotá, since 2005 and concentrated on families, men, women, youth, teens, and children.

“Capitol Ministries has a very specific focus towards people who are in eminence and people in government—the focus of evangelizing and discipling them,” Pastor Villanueva said. “I see that this is a ministry that has testimony and excellence.”

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 illustrations used in the previous endnote 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.



*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, Capitol Ministries has started ongoing ministries in more than forty U.S. state capitols and dozens of foreign federal capitols.

Capitol Ministries

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