

## Opening Words

There is a price to pay for following Christ. It's much easier to set our sights lower and slide through life without being noticed or held accountable. But I ask, "Is that what we really want?" I think, down deep, we all want more.

## 03 Living Above Reproach – Managing the Life God has Given

The greatest achievement any of us can attempt is the development of character like Christ. While this goal is something that is also crucial for women, you know that I am focusing on men in these studies. We men need to step up to the plate, and that is a sports metaphor, which most men prefer! We need to accept our role in the great contest being waged for the hearts of people – for the heart of our nation, for the hearts of our families, and for our own heart.

Over a year ago, I gave a series of messages on the book of Philippians and we noticed that in 1:27 Paul said that we are to strive together for the faith of the gospel with one spirit and one mind. The Greek word for strive is *athleo* and you can hear the word athlete in it. Paul is drawing imagery from the athletic competitions of his day and saying that we who follow Christ are in a struggle like athletes. So, men, let us engage in this great contest and develop the character of Christ so that we might shine as a bright light in this dark world.

There is a price to pay for living this way. It's much easier to set our sights lower and slide through life without being noticed or held accountable. But I ask, "Is that what we really want?" I think, down deep, we all want more. That's why I am sharing with you, and that's why you're listening.

What are the choices before us? I know of only two. Either we take up the challenge of following Christ and allow him to develop his character within us or we deteriorate spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Our humanity diminishes and we become something far less than what God had in mind and something far less than what we would want for ourselves.

Let's also be realistic about something else; we live in a world that is biased against Christ and his principles. I shared with you recently how some of our friends in Alaska were persecuted for distributing New Testaments. This is an overt bias against Christ. There is also a covert bias. We cannot walk out our door without being subtly influenced to compromise our standards. But it is not only the culture in which we live that poses problems. We are in a spiritual war. Invisible powers are at work that are bent on leading mankind astray. These are powerful forces and it is a great struggle. Satan, mind you, did not retire after he won his great victory in Eden. He continued to work actively in the world to ensure that all of Adam's descendants would continue making rebellious choices and would walk as far from God as possible. Nor did the evil one wave a flag of surrender when Christ defeated him on the cross. He still roams the earth looking for someone to devour.

But even with this, it is not spiritual warfare that is our primary problem. The root problem is inside us. WE have a bent toward sin that can only be overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit. The

desire to sin, manifested in some form in all of us, is like the power of gravity that pulls downward. Only when a higher power is turned on can this spiritual gravity be overcome.

No middle ground exists. Life is like a rushing river headed toward a dangerous waterfall. Christ calls us to swim against the current of our culture, our enemy, and the sinful desires of our heart. If we do not take up the challenge we will be swept away to the edge and over to destruction. But if we take the challenge, Christ will empower us beyond what we thought possible. We will find power to swim against the current and to achieve the high, stable ground of his character in our lives.

Remember, God expects this of us, and for good reason. Paul said we are to live above reproach *as his stewards*. We find this phrase in the Titus list of character qualities. In Titus 1:7 Paul said that men with such character must be above reproach as God's steward. A more modern word we use is manager. A manager is not the owner. He is taking care of things for the owner. The word steward has the same idea – our lives do not belong to ourselves. Our lives belong to him and God calls us to manage faithfully the one life he has entrusted to us. We will have to give an account to him some day for how well we manage what belongs to him.

God planned that we be like him. He created us like him. Even when we strayed from the path he had a plan to restore us to his likeness through the work and power of Jesus Christ. Now, through his power we can become like him. We need to make the most of our life. I exhort you to take up the challenge to become like Christ.

This is a lifelong development project. I am not talking about a weekend seminar where you will solve everything. I am not talking about an 8-week class that will give you a certificate and say you have arrived. It is lifelong project. Many bumps and bruises will come your way, but the glorious result will make the difficulties seem like nothing. We don't have to wait until the end to be encouraged. As we make progress, as we see changes in our lives and see them in the lives of others, we will be delighted. We will be motivated to continue the project as we see his character forming within and shining through us to others.

Let's take a closer look at the message Paul gave Timothy and Titus. It is by comparing the two lists in these letters that we come up with the twenty qualities. In a previous lesson we read the passage in 1 Timothy 3. Let's listen to Paul speak to Titus written for us in Titus 1:5-9.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I direct you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Many similarities exist between these two. Both are written to ensure that church leadership is exemplary. Both focus on character instead of education, oratorical skills, or personality. Both mention that a man must be above reproach in the several areas listed. These are not mere

aspirations. They are achievements to be gained. They are not impossibilities. Remember, God expects you to develop them.

Differences also exist in the passages, not in the sense of contradictions, but differences in that the two passages complement one another. Each mentions areas that the other does not. For example, Titus says a man must be devout. Timothy does not mention this. On the other hand, Timothy mentions that a man must be respectable while Titus omits this.

The two lists also use different terminology to refer to the same thing. In Timothy men are exhorted to be free from the love of money while Titus says men are not to love sordid gain. That's the same idea. We also must keep in mind that our English translations can use a different word while the original Greek in which Paul wrote is the same. *Prudent* in 1 Timothy 3:2 is translated *sensible* in Titus 1:8. When we put these passages together we come up with twenty unique qualities that we categorize into the three major arenas in life – the home arena, the private arena, and the public arena. It is in these arenas where we contest for the faith.

We find the home arena represented in such areas as managing our household well, being the husband of one wife, and being hospitable. It deals with our conduct around the members of our family and how we use our home for Christ.

We find the private arena represented in such areas as being temperate, prudent, and free from the love of money. We must avoid addiction, be devout, and self-controlled. These areas deal with our personal habits and traits. They focus on what we are when no one is looking.

We find the public arena represented in such areas our gentleness, not being quick-tempered, or self-willed. We are to be just, uncontentious, and have a good reputation with those who are not involved in the church. These areas focus on our relationships.

Finally, one theme runs through all the qualities – it is the phrase *above reproach*. This is a comprehensive term. It is not a separate character quality like gentleness or temperance but it is the common thread which runs through all the qualities and ties them together. In all the areas listed in the three arenas of home life, private life, and public life, one must be *above reproach*. We see this especially in Paul's letter to Titus. After he says that men must be above reproach, he mentions two areas related to home life. Then he repeats the phrase, above reproach, and lists more character qualities. Listen to Paul's words again.

For this reason, I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I direct you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered ... and so on

Paul is not repeating himself but is showing that in all these areas men must live above reproach so as not to bring disgrace on themselves or Christ.

Two words are used for above reproach. One has the idea of having nothing in our lives which an adversary could use to accuse us of something. The other means to be blameless. These words are

used in several other places in the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 6:14 Paul told Timothy to keep the commands of Christ without stain or *reproach*. In 1 Corinthians 1:8 Paul encouraged the entire church by saying that Christ would confirm them to the end, *blameless* in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Timothy 3:10 he says that deacons are to be *beyond reproach*, and we have already seen Colossians 1:22 where Paul says the great redemptive goal of Christ's work on the cross is to present the Church, not just the pastors, but the entire Church holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

What we are going to do in the coming broadcasts is look through these lists, make sure we understand these qualities, and ask ourselves some penetrating questions. I hope you will join us for each one as we learn to manage the life God has given and become men who are above reproach.