

Scriptural Principles Concerning Called Workers Who Commit a Public Sin

[Manitowoc Pastoral Conference; November 16, 1992]

by: Glenn H. Unke

As this paper was assigned to me, I understand it to be a sequel to the one, presented by our brother Rossman, who delivered his paper about a year ago to the day.

I want to thank the brothers of the Program Committee of the Conference for this opportunity to pursue in depth in the Scriptures material for this most weighty subject.

There are two verses of Scripture which shall be our chief concern in this paper. In these two verses there are two words of description which we shall try to define to the best of our ability and from these definitions to try to draw some conclusions.

The title of this paper is "Scriptural Principles Concerning Called Workers Who Commit a Public Sin." We shall consider these two words: "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2) and "blameless" (Titus 1:6.) After our remarks concerning these two words of description of an overseer/elder, we shall try to draw a conclusion.

1. 1 Timothy 3:2 - "Now the overseer must be *above reproach.*"

The Greek word for "above reproach" is *anepil hmpov*. This word is composed of the Alpha Privativum and the root word, *epil ambanw*. The root word means "to lay hold of", "to seize". The literal definition for this Greek word is "not to be reprehended", "not to be seized" "not to be found fault with". The overseer, the called person, is to be of a character that no one can rightfully take hold of the person with a charge of unfitness. Then follows a list of personal qualities in which this person is not to be censured in - "the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable."

2. Titus 1:6. - "An elder must be *blameless.*"

The Greek word for "blameless" is *anegkl htov*. This word is composed of the Alpha Privativum and the root word *egkal ew*. The root word means "to call to account, to bring a charge against." The Greek word used in Titus means "not to bring a charge against."

Both the Greek words are used interchangeably and their root meanings convey the same meaning. They both point to a qualification for a man to be an overseer or an elder—a called pastor and/or a called teacher. The called person is to be above reproach and blameless.

In most dogmatic books and articles about the qualifications of a pastor the two Biblical accounts are quoted, but the one qualification "blameless" is most often used.

Your essayist will follow this pattern also.

Blamelessness does not mean sinlessness. If this were the case, there would be no one qualified. It does mean that no charge of a grave moral offense can be sustained against him.

When a called worker is found guilty of a public sin, there are several Scriptural principles which must be reviewed and considered.

There must be consideration for the fallen brother. Our Lord tells us in Galatians 6:1: "*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.*" Much care and love must be shown to our brother at that critical time. The law of our God must be reviewed with him and the forgiving love of our Savior must be held before him .

Matthew 18: 15 tells us that "*if he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*"

This called worker has violated his call in this public sin and it will be the responsibility of the calling body to deal with him. Most constitutions read that there are three reasons for the termination of a call: (1) false doctrine (2) impenitence and continuance in a scandalous life; (3) willful neglect of duty.

This situation must be weighed by the calling body and hearing the called worker's reaction to brotherly admonition—either accepting it and repenting or refusing it and continuing in his sin—will have to make a decision.

It certainly is very possible that the hearts of the members of the calling body are moved by their love and respect for their fallen brother to forgive and forget even as the Lord forgives and forgets all our sins. This forgiveness and love would then be expressed by a vote of confidence and a prayer for strength for the fallen brother and for all the members of the calling body.

It certainly is possible that there might be some of the members who are willing to forgive and forget, but are fearful that he is no longer “blameless” in their eyes or in the eyes of others. They would rightfully seek the termination of his call.

It certainly is possible that there might be some of the members of the calling body who would forgive and forget the sin committed, but would be constrained by Scripture to urge him to seek a call elsewhere. They might be doubtful concerning the effectiveness of the person's ministry to win the outsider. The Scripture which would move them to this judgment would be 1 Timothy 3:7 - “*He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*”

The called worker must also be reminded that on the day of his installation he promised that he would heed the directive of the Apostle Paul to Timothy - 1 Timothy 4: 12 - “*Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*”

As he is a called worker in the vineyard of the Lord, he is never to put a stumbling block in anyone's path, so that his ministry will not be discredited.(2 Corinthians 6:3). The public sin violated that promise. The calling body has the right to demand his resignation on the grounds that he broke his promise and has lost their confidence and trust in his ministry .

The called worker's own spiritual welfare is also at stake as it is written in 1 Timothy 4:16: “*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*”

It is absolutely necessary that a called worker ever keeps before him the gravity of his divine call and the work of the holy ministry even as Daniel writes: “*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.*”(Daniel 12:3.)

Paul reminds the called worker that he is a “jar of clay”, pointing to the weakness and vulnerability of each of us who are called by the Lord to do the greatest work on earth.

One last word concerning this important subject—each case must be determined in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the unique particulars which present themselves. The writers of *Shepherd Under Christ* express it this way: “*A precedent dare never be the starting point in determining what is proper in a given case, but rather what the Lord Himself says.*” (4)

Soli Deo Gloria!

Bibliography

Abiding Word - Vol II, 492 “The Office of the Public Ministry”

Abiding Word - Vol. I, 388 “The Call Into the Public Ministry”

Our Great Heritage - Vol. III - 526 “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys”

A Summary Of Christian Doctrine, E.Koehler - 240 “The Office of the Ministry”

Shepherd Under Christ, Schuetz,Habeck - pp. 1-3 The Shepherd I. His Character

Christian Dogmatics, F.Pieper Vol.111 pp. 439-462 “The Public Ministry”

Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, July 1957; April, 1961; October, 1972; April, 1976

Augsburg Commentary On The New Testament - I &II Timothy, Titus

The People’s Bible- I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus

The Pastoral Epistles, Homer Kent, Jr. - I Timothy, 2 Timothy Titus

The Pastoral Epistles, Donald Guthrie - 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus

Interpretation of Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, R. C. H. Lenski

Concordia Self-Study Bible - New International Version