

# The Pastor Must Be “Above Reproach”:

## An Examination of ἀνεπίλημπος (1 Timothy 3:2) and ἀνέγκλητος (Titus 1:6) with Application to the Public Ministry of the Gospel<sup>1</sup>

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In this study the Greek words ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος are examined with a view to ascertaining what the Apostle Paul says about the qualifications necessary for *entering* the public ministry, for *remaining* in the ministry, and for possible *reentry* on the part of one who has disqualified himself from the ministry.

We will address this issue by raising and answering a series of questions, after which we will close with a few summary statements.

### What is meant by ἀνεπίλημπος?

The NIV translates: “Now the overseer must be *above reproach*” (1 Tim 3:2). The word ἀνεπίλημπος is a verbal adjective derived from ἐπιλαμβάνω, “to take hold of.” In 2 Timothy 3:2 it is used with ἀ (+ν), which negativises it. Literally, ἀ(ν)επίλημπος pictures one who “can’t be taken hold of.” It is a relatively rare word. According to Trench, “ἀνεπίλημπος, of somewhat rare use in classical Greek,...[is] never [found] in the Septuagint or the Apocrypha.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to the reference in 1 Timothy 3:2, ἀνεπίλημπος is found in two other places in the New Testament: 1 Timothy 5:7, “Give the people these instructions [about proper care of widows], too, so that no one may be open to blame [ἵνα ἀνεπίλημπος ᾖσιν]; and 1 Timothy 6:13-14, “I charge you to keep this command [cf. v. 3ff for the content of Paul’s command] without spot or blame [ἀνεπίλημpton].”

Lexicographers and commentators offer such definitions and descriptions of ἀνεπίλημπος as the following:

- Kittel: “one who cannot be attacked, seized, laid hold of”; “inviolable,” “unassailable,” “blameless”<sup>3</sup>
- Louw/Nida: “above criticism,” “beyond reproach”<sup>4</sup>
- Trench: “affording nothing which an adversary could take hold of”<sup>5</sup>
- Luther: “beyond accusation and can neither rightly nor justly be accused”<sup>6</sup>
- Lenski: “of such a character that no one can rightfully take hold of the person with a charge of unfitness”<sup>7</sup>
- Fee: “irreproachable *observable* conduct”<sup>8</sup>
- Kent: “consistent, mature Christian living which gives no occasion for public reproach”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This study was presented on April 27, 1998, in a somewhat different format, to the Conference of Presidents of the WELS.

<sup>2</sup> Trench, Richard C., *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963 reprint of 9<sup>th</sup> edition), p 381.

<sup>3</sup> Kittel, Gerhard, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p 9.

<sup>4</sup> Louw, Johannes, and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), p 436.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 382.

<sup>6</sup> American Edition, vol 28 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1973), “Lectures on I Timothy,” p 284.

<sup>7</sup> Lenski, R.C.H., *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964), p 579.

<sup>8</sup> Fee, Gordon, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1984), p 80.

- Knight: “irreproachable, in the sense of not open to attack or criticism in terms of his Christian life in general and in terms of the characteristics that follow in particular”; he is not “objectively chargeable”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the translation that captures best the etymology of the word is “unassailable,” with its dictionary meaning of “not capable of being seized successfully.”<sup>11</sup>

### What is meant by ἀνέγκλητος?

Outside of the Pastoral Epistles, ἀνέγκλητος is used two times in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 1:8, “He [Christ] will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless [βεβαιώσει ὑμᾶς ἀνεγκλήτους] on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”; and Colossians 1:22, “He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation [ἀνεγκλήτους].”

In the Pastoral Epistles we see the following usages of ἀνέγκλητος: Of “deacons” in 1 Timothy 3:10: “They must first be tested, and then if there is nothing against them [ἀνέγκλητοι ὄντες], let them serve as deacons”; and of the “elder/overseer” in Titus 1:6-7: “An elder must be blameless [ἀνέγκλητος]... Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless [ἀνέγκλητον].”

In common with ἀνεπίλημπτος, ἀνέγκλητος is a verbal adjective. It is derived from ἐγκαλέομαι (ἐν + καλέομαι), “to call to account” (Romans 8:33, “Who shall bring any charge [ἐγκαλέσει] against those whom God has chosen?”) The noun form is ἔγκλημα, “accusation,” “complaint”; “crime,” “defect.”

Negativised (ἀ [+ν]), ἀ(ν)έγκλητος pictures one who “can’t be called to account” because there is nothing with which the person can be rightfully charged. In classical Greek it described “a person or thing against which no accusation can be made, or free from guilt”; hence, “not accused,” “innocent.” The word was found often in the papyri (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) in the sense of “without blame,” “irreproachable.”

Lexicons supply such meanings as:

- Kittel: “a person or thing against which there can be no ἔγκλημα and which is thus ‘free from reproach,’ ‘without stain,’ ‘guiltless’”<sup>12</sup>
- Colin-Brown: “not accused,” “without reproach,” “blameless”; “In the Pastorals [the meaning] is akin to the usage in Hellenistic colloquial speech... beyond reproach... [displaying] common respectability”<sup>13</sup>
- Louw/Nida: “without accusation”; “pertaining to one who cannot be accused of anything wrong”; “without the possibility of anyone accusing you”<sup>14</sup>
- Thayer: “that cannot be called to account”; “unreproachable,” “unaccused,” “blameless”<sup>15</sup>

Commentators offer such descriptions as:

<sup>9</sup> Kent, Homer, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), p 121.

<sup>10</sup> Knight, George, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp 155-156.

<sup>11</sup> *Webster’s II New Riverside University Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> Op. Cit., Vol 1, p 356.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, Colin, gen. ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp 923-924.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., p 438.

<sup>15</sup> Thayer, Joseph, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p 44.

- Lenski: “unaccused”; “not one about whose past or present accusations are being circulated”<sup>16</sup>
- Kent: “one who is not called into question or called to account”<sup>17</sup>
- Stott: “without blame”; “the pastorate is a public office and therefore the candidate’s public reputation is important”<sup>18</sup>
- Kelly: “they should offer no loophole for criticism”<sup>19</sup>

Possibly the best single word with which to translate ἀνεπίκλητος would be “irreproachable” with its idea of being “beyond rebuke or blame.”

### **In whose eyes does the elder/overseer need to be ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος?**

Paul cannot be referring to being ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος in the sight of God. For, though according to his New Man *every* Christian is totally ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος God’s eyes,<sup>20</sup> according to his Old Man *no* Christian is ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος before God (“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature,” Ro 7:18). In the passages in 1 Timothy and Titus, however, it is assumed that some are ἀνεπίκλητοι and ἀνεγκλητοι and that some are not.

In the use of these words in the Pastorals, therefore, the emphasis is on what the elder/overseer needs to be in the sight of men, both those in the church and those outside of the church. Luther writes:

Before God no one is above reproach, but before men the bishop is to be so, that he may not be a fornicator, an adulterer, a greedy man, a foul-mouthed person, a drunkard, a gambler, a slanderer. If he is falsely accused, no harm; he is still above reproach; no law can accuse him before men. Samuel and Moses are good examples. Samuel said, “If I have defrauded anyone, etc.” (cf. 1 Sam. 12:3). There he showed how innocent he was, as far as men were concerned. Moses spoke this way before Korah (cf. Num. 16:15). To live this way, that you do not harm your neighbor by theft or adultery, means that no man can accuse you of anything or say: “You have stolen from me; you have raped my wife.”<sup>21</sup>

He should not have public guilt which causes people to stumble...Paul is speaking about public vices, where the state is obliged to say and to give testimony about him that he is doing me an injustice and that a detractor will find something to cavil at; that is, he should be the kind of person who cannot be accused openly and publicly.<sup>22</sup>

### **What determines whether an elder/overseer is ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος?**

The terms ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 describe the broad general qualification for an elder/overseer. Then follows a list of specific qualifications which describe what it means to be ἀνεπίκλητος and ἀνεγκλητος. This is not an all-inclusive list (cf., for example, 1 Corinthians 4:2, “It is

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit., p 896.

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit., p 213.

<sup>18</sup> Stott, John, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), p 175.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly, J.D.N., *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963), p 231.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. this use of ἀνεγκλητος in 1 Corinthians 1:8 and Colossians 1:22, as cited above.

<sup>21</sup> American Edition, vol 28, “Lectures on 1 Timothy,” p 284.

<sup>22</sup> American Edition, vol 29, “Lectures on Titus,” pp 17-18.

required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful”; 2 Corinthians 6:3, “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry [literally, “*the ministry*”] will not be discredited”; Titus 2:7-8, “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us”; 1 Timothy 4:12, “Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity”; 1 Peter 5:3, “Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock”; 2 Timothy 2:15, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”).

The lists in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are quite representative, however, of what the Scriptures say elsewhere about what makes an elder/overseer *ἀνεπίλημπος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*. Note that in these lists only *one ability* is mentioned as a prerequisite for the public ministry: *διδασκτικός*, “able to teach.” All of the others have to do with Christian *character*. The lists are quite similar, yet with differences, evidence again that Paul does not intend to set down each and every trait that is necessary for an elder/overseer to be called *ἀνεπίλημπος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*.

1 Timothy 3	Titus 1
μιάς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ, a “one woman man”	μιάς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ
νηφάλιον, “sober-minded”	
σώφρων, “of sound judgment”	σώφρων
κόσμιος, “orderly”	
φιλόξενος, “hospitable”	φιλόξενος
διδασκτικός, “able to teach”	ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδαχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου, ἵνα δυνατὸς ᾖ καὶ παρακαλεῖν ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῆ ὑγιαίνουσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας ἐλέγχειν, “one who holds fast to the trustworthy Word in accordance with the body of doctrine, in order that he might be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to expose/rebuke those who oppose”
μὴ πάροινος, lit., “not alongside of wine,” “not an abuser of drink”	μὴ πάροινος
μὴ πλήκτης, δὲ ἐπιεικής, “not a bully [lit., ‘one who strikes a blow’], but gentle, yielding”	μὴ πλήκτης
ἄμαχος, lit., “not a fighter”; positively, “a peacemaker”	μὴ ὄλιγος, “not quick-tempered”
ἀφιλάργυρος, “not a lover of money”	μὴ αἰσχροκερδής, “not greedy for shameful [i.e., dishonest] gain”
τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον, τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, μετὰ πάσης, σεμνότητος, “one who manages his own household well, having his children in submission, with all dignity [NIV: ‘with proper respect’]”	τέκνα ἔχων πιστὰ μὴ ἐν κατηγορίᾳ ἀσωτίας ἢ ἀνυπότακτα, “who has believing children not open to the charge of wild living or insubordination”
μὴ νεόφυτος, lit., “not newly-planted,” “not a new	

convert”	
δεῖ...μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν, “it is necessary that he have a good reputation with those on the outside	
	μὴ αὐθάδης, “not self-pleasing”
	φιλάγαθος, “a lover of what is good”
	δίκαιος, “just”
	ὅσιος, “holy,” “pious”

We need to remember that Paul puts *all* of these qualifications on the same plane. Are we tempted, perhaps, to single out one or two as worse than all the others, e.g., sexual immorality, and to more or less overlook some of the other qualifications?

### **Why is it so important that the elder/overseer be ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος?**

Besides the fact the Lord tells us so, there are at least two other factors involved. For one thing, there is the trust *factor*. A pastor is a shepherd, called to feed and lead and guard the flock. The members of the flock need to have confidence that their shepherd is a good shepherd, one whose word and guidance and counsel should be followed. One whose conduct contradicts his counsel will not inspire the confidence of the flock (or of the “other sheep” that Christ wants to bring into his sheepfold) to follow him where he leads.

There is also the *offence factor*. Permitting someone to serve (or to continue to serve) in the public ministry whose reputation before the church and the world is not ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος could result in leading someone to think lightly of the sin that appears to be tolerated in the minister of the gospel with the result that the person allows himself/herself to fall into the same sin. We all know what Jesus says about a person who causes someone else to sin (cf. Matthew 18:6).

A less than unassailable and irreproachable reputation could also lead others to think lightly of the ministry and ultimately of the Lord Jesus whose ministry it is. St. Paul addresses this issue in the passage cited previously, 2 Corinthians 6:3 (“We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry [literally, “the ministry] will not be discredited”). Paul does a couple of things in this verse to emphasize as strongly as he can the necessity of giving absolutely no occasion for someone to “blame” the ministry. He puts the negative *μηδμίαν* in the emphatic first place in the sentence and he also uses a double negative (*μηδμίαν...ἐν μηδενί*), which intensifies the negative. The word translated “blame” (from *μωμαίωμαι*) has in it the suggestion of mockery and ridicule.<sup>23</sup> Permitting a man to serve in the ministry who is not ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος could lead to people castigating and mocking the ministry.

Luther writes:

Every preacher should prove these two things: first, a blameless life so that he can be firm and no one will have cause to blaspheme his doctrine; second, irreproachable doctrine so that he will mislead none of those who follow him; and so he may correctly stand on both sides: with the good life against the enemies who look much more at life than at doctrine and despise the

<sup>23</sup> The Greek god Μῶμος was the god of mockery and ridicule (cf. Hughes, Philip. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], p 221.

doctrine because of the life; with the doctrine toward the friends, who pay much more attention to the doctrine than to the life and bear also the life for the sake of the doctrine.<sup>24</sup>

### **To what degree must an elder/overseer be ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος?**

Even in the eyes of man (both the church and the world) a person will always be at best relatively ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος. It would depend, it seems, upon at least two factors: how public the sin is and the nature of the sin. There is, of course, a close connection between the two. In general, the more gross the nature of the sin, the more wide-spread will be the reports of it.

#### *How public the sin is*

There may be good reason, for example, for not assigning a particular person to the congregation where he grew up or for a pastor not to accept a call back into the congregation of his youth. There may well be a few people there who remember some less than irreproachable moments in that person's growing up years and who might, therefore, find it difficult to look upon him as a faithful, trustworthy shepherd. This failure to be ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος may have been public in the sense that some know about it; but it might not have spread beyond a relatively small group of people and therefore would not render that person ineligible to serve somewhere else in the ministry.

Or, a pastor in his first parish might display incredibly bad judgment in the way he deals with a number of people and situations. Hence, he is no longer σώφρων, a man of "sound judgment," in the eyes of the congregation, which means he has lost the status of being ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος. This would not automatically mean, however, if knowledge of this failure to be ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος has not spread far and wide (and if the man has learned from his errors), that such a person would automatically be disqualified from serving elsewhere (though technically, again, he is not ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος, at least not with all people, which is what we mean when we say that one will never be more than *relatively* ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος).

#### *What the nature of the sin is*

Though in God's eyes a sin is a sin, some sins are more apt than others to render a person no longer ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος in the eyes of man; for some sins are much more likely to destroy trust and/or cause offence than others. That is undoubtedly why Walther says in his *Pastoral Theology*: "Only that one who has lived shamefully before the world in vices such as drunkenness, thievery, sexual immorality, and the like, should not be put into the office nor tolerated in it."<sup>25</sup>

A one-time blow-up at a church council meeting, for example, or a harsh response to a person who is getting on a pastor's nerves technically makes the pastor no longer ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος (cf. μὴ ὀργίλος, "not quick-tempered," and μὴ πλήκτης, δὲ ἐπεικῆς, "not a bully, but gentle"). It very well may not disqualify him from serving in that place, however, for the congregation might still be able to continue to trust him, and his behavior is not causing others to stumble. If, however, it became a pattern of behavior, that would be a different story. On the other hand, if a pastor put his hands into the church's till only one time, this action

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by C.F.W. Walther in his *Pastoral Theology*, translated by John Drickamer [New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995], p 267.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 266.

would undoubtedly make it impossible for the person to continue in the ministry (at least in that place); for most certainly it would be difficult for the congregation to trust him after such an action. In addition, if law enforcement officials were called in, the pastor would no longer have a good reputation with those on the outside.

Another example: Though both are sins, there is a difference in the eyes of man between a pastor who commits adultery with a member's wife and a pastor who causes his fiancée to become pregnant. Though both actions would undoubtedly result in the pastor having to resign from the ministry, the former may have more far-reaching consequences than the latter. The adulterer would no longer be seen as *μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ*, a "one woman man," making it very difficult for his or another congregation to trust him; and his reputation with those on the outside would no longer be *καλός*. On the other hand, the one whose fiancée has become pregnant, while he has committed a sin and, lest he cause others to stumble, more than likely should not be permitted to continue in the ministry at his present station, is unlikely to be viewed as a promiscuous person who cannot be trusted to be *μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ*, a "one woman man." Hence there may well be more likelihood of the latter being able to return to the ministry some day than the former.

A third example: A pastor might have raised his family very well. Those who know him and his family would have no difficulty saying that he "manages his own household well, having his children in submission" (1 Tim 3:4). He has "believing children not open to the charge of wild living or insubordination" (Tit 1:6). But there is this one exception: Child #5 of his family of five children doesn't fit the same mold. He has been nothing but trouble and has been involved in nothing but trouble. Again, technically the pastor is no longer *ἀνεπίλημπος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*. The congregation, however, may well look at the way their pastor has raised his other four children and reach the conclusion that in this instance the pastor is not to blame. He has been a faithful father, fulfilling what God asks a father to do; the son, however, has rejected the guidance and counsel of the father. Their conclusion, therefore, is that the pastor has not lost the trust of the congregation and should not resign his office. If, on the other hand, the ungodly behavior of son #5 has become public in the community (e.g., he is arrested for drunkenness, assault, etc.), the pastor may no longer "have a good reputation with those on the outside" (1 Tim 3:7) and therefore may not be able to serve any longer in that congregation.

**Can a person who, while in the ministry, lost the status of being *ἀνεπίλημπος* and *ἀνέγκλητος* and resigns his call (or whose call has been terminated "for cause") ever be reinstated into the ministry? Can a person who was not *ἀνεπίλημπος* and *ἀνέγκλητος* prior to being considered for a call into the ministry ever be considered eligible for a call?**

It has been maintained by some that disqualification from the ministry is permanent, that there is no basis for considering reinstatement. This is not the language of the Seminary's pastoral theology textbook, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, which states:

The pastor who has fallen into gross sins of the flesh and has lost his "good report of them that are without" will *seldom* be able to continue as pastor even though the congregation has acknowledged his repentance, assured him of forgiveness, and accepted him back as a brother in Christ. Whether he can serve in another congregation will need to be determined by those to whom the synodical fellowship has given the responsibility of proposing candidates to congregations. *More often than not* they may conclude that his lapse cannot remain hidden from other congregations and decide against proposing his name [italics added].<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Schuetze, Armin, and Irwin Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1981), p 47.

One reason given by those who maintain that disqualification from the ministry is permanent is the absence in the New Testament of any guidelines for reinstating a pastor after he has disqualified himself. It is always dangerous to argue from silence, however. For example, there are no guidelines in the Scriptures pertaining to the remarriage of one who has wrongfully broken a marriage but subsequently repented. Yet the absence of such guidelines does not mean that such a person is forbidden to remarry under any circumstances.<sup>27</sup>

In seeking an answer to the above questions, it is important to consider the Greek words *δεῖ* and *ἐστίν*: *δεῖ...τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι* (1 Tim 3:2); *εἴ τις ἐστίν ἀνέγκλητος* (Tit 1:6); *δεῖ...τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνέγκλητον εἶναι* (Tit 1:7). Note that they are present tenses. The question is not: “Did this person at one time fail to fit the general qualification of being *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*?” The question is: “Is the person at the present time *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*?” What is the current potential for offence, for causing another person to stumble and fall, for bringing discredit and ridicule upon the ministry, if this person is reinstated or given a first call into the ministry? Will the congregation and those still outside the Shepherd’s sheepfold be able to trust him as a good and faithful shepherd?”

It also needs to be taken into account, as brought out above, that even in the eyes of man (both the church and the world) a person will always be at best *relatively* *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*. Therefore, it would be incorrect to conclude that a person cannot be considered *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος* if there were the remote possibility that even one person might be caused to stumble, or one person might be inclined to mock the holy ministry, or one person might not be inclined to trust that person if he should be reinstated or called for the first time into the ministry.

An example: A pastor who does not have the reputation of being *πάροικος*, a heavy drinker (1 Tim 3:3, Tit 1:7) carelessly consumes a few too many drinks on one occasion, is stopped by the police on the way home, fails a sobriety test, and is issued a citation for driving while under the influence of alcohol. The matter becomes public both to the church and to those on the outside because the pastor’s name appears in the paper. No longer *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος* either in the eyes of his congregation or the community, the pastor resigns from his call.<sup>28</sup> Should he at some future point seek to be reinstated into the ministry, what he did in the past should not be that which determines whether or not he should be reinstated but rather what he is in the eyes of the church and the world at the time he requests to be reinstated. What he did in the past may, of course, have a big bearing on the way the church and the world look upon him when later he seeks to be reinstated, but not necessarily. Will a congregation be able to trust him as its shepherd? Will his being reinstated cause someone to stumble? If the answer to the first question is “yes,” and the answer to the second question is “no,” the man could well be reinstated and be eligible for a call. The conclusion would be that at one time he was *not* *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος* but that now he *is*. Such a conclusion could be reached even though it might not be possible to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that absolutely everyone would answer the questions in that way. A man will always be *relatively* *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος*, both in his conduct and in the percentage of people who will consider him to be such.

Another example: A seminarian has sexual relations with his fiancée which results in her becoming pregnant. At that point he is no longer *ἀνεπίλημπτος* and *ἀνέγκλητος* and would normally be asked to leave the seminary, especially because of the offence it would cause if he were permitted to remain (In practice, when such a situation has occurred, the seminary student has always made the decision on his own to discontinue). If the young man applied for re-enrollment a few years later, the question would be, “What is this young man’s

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Armin Schuetze, “Theses on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 79:4, Fall 1982, p 251 ff (also reprinted as an appendix in Schuetze/Matzke, *The Counseling Shepherd* [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1988], pp 230-243).

<sup>28</sup> Since this was a highly non-characteristic offence, it could be that the congregation would urge its pastor to continue his call; or, because of the public nature of the offence in that community, the district president might put his name onto a call list of a congregation some distance from the community but not insist that the man resign from the ministry.



reputation right now?” (present tense of δέῃ and ἔστιν). Though repentance and visible fruits of repentance are not the only criteria for determining whether or not a person who once was ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος should be considered for a call, they may well be part of the mix in determining if a person can now serve without causing offence or fear that he might fall into the same sin (thus making it difficult for people to trust him). The question might be asked, “If we permit this young man to re-enroll, can those responsible for assigning him to the ministry be totally sure that absolutely no one will be caused to stumble or will not be able to trust the ministry of this man who in the past was not ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος?” The answer would have to be, “Most likely not.” But it can conclude *from what it is able to observe* that the man is now ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος and therefore eligible for a call into the ministry.<sup>29</sup> Again, there is such a thing as a person who at one time was *not* ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος who over the course of time has once again *become* ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος.

### **Are there some sins which by their very nature render a man permanently ineligible for the ministry?**

Some sins on the part of a pastor, particularly gross sins against the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Commandments (e.g., adultery, homosexuality, sexual misconduct with children, stealing), may well make it impossible for a man to ever again be reinstated into the ministry; for they have been of such a nature and perhaps have become so public (after he has been caught) that he could never regain the status of being ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος.

If it has become clear that the nature of a man’s sin not only has made it impossible for him to continue as a pastor but made it impossible for him ever to be reinstated to the ministry, then it would be best for the sake of the man himself to clearly tell him so. That way he can move ahead with his life without constantly wondering if and when he might be able to get back into the ministry. The same would be true of someone preparing for the ministry.

### Summary

1. A pastor needs to be ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος (unassailable and irreproachable), as described especially in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9, both in the eyes of those he serves and in the eyes of the world.
2. These qualifications must be present if a man is to be eligible for a call into the ministry, if he is to remain in the ministry, and if he is to be considered for reinstatement into the ministry.
3. A pastor who is ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος will inspire the trust of his flock and will not be at risk of causing people to stumble.
4. This side of eternity a person will always be *relatively* ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος since all, including ministers of the gospel, are still sinners. Therefore, one has to ascertain how public the sin is and the nature of the sin to determine whether or not a man is eligible for entering, continuing in, or re-entering the ministry.
5. A person who at one time was not ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος and therefore ineligible for the ministry may in time once again become ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος. In ascertaining the eligibility of a man to enter or re-enter the ministry, the question needs to be, “Is the man at the present time ἀνεπίλημπος and ἀνέγκλητος?”

<sup>29</sup> Or, of course, it could reach just the opposite conclusion, again, based on what it is able to observe at the time of assignment.

May the Lord give wisdom to those responsible for making decisions relative to the eligibility of men to serve in the public ministry of the church. It is Christ's ministry, not ours to do with as we please. May we always bring honor to Christ, therefore, in all we do.