

## 11 Living Above Reproach – Gentle, Uncontentious, Not Self-Willed

Hello everyone and welcome to our program today. As you know, we are talking about men living above reproach. We have been talking about building 20 character qualities in our lives. Twenty is too many to remember but if we can remember that all of them can be organized into three areas, that helps us considerably. These three areas are our home life, what we are in private, and what we are in public. These are like three great arenas or stadiums where a great contest or conflict or competition is being played out. Think of a football stadium where 100,000 are watching two college teams play their hardest to win a championship. But in this stadium you are on the field and you are competing with the strategies God has given you to overcome the world, the devil, and the flesh. In one of these stadiums you are competing to be a man who is above reproach in your home life. In another stadium or arena you are competing to be a man above reproach in private. In a third stadium you are competing to be a man who is above reproach in public in all your relationships. This third stadium, this third arena is the one we are looking at today.

In our previous message we learned that God wants all of us men to be able to teach. This does not mean that we have to be great orators or even have to stand in front of a crowd. It does mean that we must know God's word and that we must have the patience, kindness, gentleness, and wisdom to guide another person into God's truth. All of us men can and should do that. We also learned that we men must not have a warlike or pugnacious spirit. We cannot be men who lash out at others with anger.

Today we are going to look at three more qualities that every man should have. We must be men who are gentle, uncontentious and not self-willed. Gentle and uncontentious are found in 1 Timothy 3:3. Not being self-willed is found in Titus 1:7. Let's look at gentleness. This probably isn't a popular topic for men to hear. Many men want to be the rugged, outdoorsman type. Or they want to be the super athlete who can take a hit and keep on running toward the end zone for the game winning score.

Ah the vanity we must deal with in our own hearts! And the misunderstanding we must deal with! Jesus was gentle, yet he was hardly a pushover. Jesus said "I am gentle and humble in heart." But he was also the one who drove the money changers out of the temple and such was his authority that his personal presence was enough to prohibit people from entering the temple. Jesus also was strong enough to endure 40 lashes from the Roman scourge. Many a man would die just from that, but Jesus was strong enough to endure it, to carry his cross most of the way to Golgotha, and then to endure six more hours of torture on a Roman cross. Yet, Jesus was a gentle man.

The New Testament uses two words for gentleness. The first has the idea that we are strong enough to grant clemency to others for their wrongs and that we are gracious to people. The second has the idea of being courteous, considerate, and humble with others. For example, Paul uses this first word in 2 Corinthians 10:1 when he says, "I urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ," and then he goes on to talk about spiritual warfare! In Philippians 4:5 he said "let your forbearing spirit be made known to all men." James said in 3:17 that the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then peaceable, then gentle.

The second word is used in places including Matthew 5:5 when Jesus said "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." And when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey he did so to fulfill the prophecy of the king who was coming to his people with gentleness.

As you can see, this is a quality for a man, for a man's man. We better find out what it means. Gentleness means that we exercise sensitivity and care in meeting the needs of others. That's it. It doesn't mean we are wimpy. It doesn't mean we are pushovers. It means that we develop a heart of sensitivity so that we are aware of the needs of others around us so that we can serve those needs. That's a gentle man, and that's the goal for all of us.

Let me ask you three questions then that may help you to discover if you are a man of gentleness.

- Do I listen to others and am I sensitive to what they are thinking and feeling?
- Am I alert to people's choice of words, their tone of voice, and their facial expression? You see all of these are clues as to what is really going on in the heart of another.
- Would my wife and children say that I am gentle at home with them?

The next area Paul talks about is that we should be men who are uncontentious. This means that we need to be men who do not strive against others in controversies. This means that we will stay away, as much as possible from strife, argument, competition, and rivalry in order to maintain unity. Remember the verse in 2 Timothy 2:24 where Paul said the bondservant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, in gentleness correcting others? Listen to the verse right before it. Paul said to Timothy that he must "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations knowing that they produce quarrels." He told Timothy,

“Timothy, do not go there in your conversations. You will drag yourself down with men who are not men of character. Men of character are not looking for a fight and they are not looking for an argument to win.” May I point out to you also that in Titus 3:2 Paul says the entire church should be peaceable and the Greek word is the same as the one we are looking at here. We should be uncontentious and people who are not always arguing about something.

So how should we be? We know what we should not be like. What should we be like? We must learn to listen to the thoughts, the ideas, the plans of others. It means that we must be willing to yield to the plans of others. It means we are not compelled to have to do things our way. It means that we place a high priority on unity and peace. It means that we will not be an argumentative person. This does not mean that we don't have conviction. We must also be men of conviction who know what we stand for in Christ. But we have gained such security in Christ that we are able to talk with others without feeling threatened and therefore without arguing. It also means that we have laid aside fleshly ambitions. We don't have to be first. We don't have to be recognized. We don't have to win every game we play.

Let's ask ourselves some tough questions, now.

- Do I listen to the thoughts, ideas, and suggestions of others?
- Do I thrive on ungodly competition and challenge or do I seek to build up others?
- Do I seek to promote unity and peace among God's people?
- Do I prefer arguing and debating or conciliation and understanding?

We have one more area to cover today. It's closely related to the area of being uncontentious. Paul said we must be men who are not self-willed. This has the idea of being stubborn and arrogant. It means that we tenaciously adhere to our will in a matter, or our wish and that we disregard the wishes of others.

Look, make sure you understand that we are not talking about holding fast to God's word in the face of heresy or spiritual attack. That's being a man of conviction. We are not talking about that. We are not talking about holding on by faith to a goal or a vision God has given us when things don't seem to be working out. That's being a man of faith. We are talking about being inflexible in our opinion, of being difficult to handle, to manage, or to work with because we have to have our way, we always think our ideas are the best, we disregard the wishes of others and give no consideration to them, and we refuse to yield to the ideas of or wishes of others even when they are clearly better.

There was a man like this in one of the churches that the apostle John was overseeing. His name was Diotrephes. Here is what John said about him.

I wrote to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be the leader, refuses to have anything to do with us. <sup>10</sup> When I come, I will report some of the things he is doing and the evil accusations he is making against us. Not only does he refuse to welcome the traveling teachers, he also tells others not to help them. And when they do help, he puts them out of the church.

Let's listen to some familiar words from the apostles about the kind of men we should be. Listen to Paul in Philippians 2:2-4. This is the New Living Translation. “ Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

Listen to Peter in 1 Peter 3:8: “ Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

Here are some penetrating questions for this area.

- Do I frequently insist on having my own way?
- Do I tend to think my ideas are the best?
- Do I regard the wishes of others and give them consideration?
- Do I know the difference between being self-willed and being a man of conviction?
- Do I gladly seek the counsel of others?

So now we have covered five areas for our public life. On the positive side we should be men who are able to teach God's word. We should be men who are gentle. On the negative side we should be men who avoid being pugnacious, who avoid being contentious, who avoid being self-willed. All of us fall short in some ways. We must seek for Christ's grace to open our eyes to our ways that are displeasing to him and to rid these things from our lives. We must seek God's grace to make us men who are above reproach.

Intro – Do you think that following Christ means that we become whimpy men who are a pushover? That's not

the way Christ was! Yet Scripture says that Christ was gentle and it tells us if we are to be above reproach we are to be gentle men. Looks like we better find out what it means.