

Building a Good Name

by Bryan Gibson

Among the qualifications given for elders is the following: “he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:7). So in order for a man to become an elder, he must have a good reputation, not just among his brothers and sisters in Christ, but also among those outside the church. In other words, he must have a good name in the community.

But a good name is not just important for elders. Every Christian should strive to have a good name or reputation. Let’s take a closer look at what the Bible teaches on this subject.

A good name is a very precious, a very valuable asset.

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches...” (Proverbs 22:1). “A good name is better than precious ointment...” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). Why is it so valuable? Because it greatly affects the influence we have on the world around us. It’s awful hard to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world if our reputation has been damaged (see Matthew 5:13-16).

It takes many deeds to build a good name, but only one to lose it.

That may seem unfair, but experience tells us that it is true. The following passage shows one of the many ways a good reputation can be ruined: “Debate your case with your neighbor, and do not disclose the secret to another; lest he who hears it expose your shame, and your reputation be ruined” (Proverbs 25:9-10). Showing a lack of trustworthiness—telling something that we should not—is a good way to ruin a good name. I’m sure you can think of many others. Sometimes, we don’t even have to do anything wrong to lose our good name. We may just be guilty of suspicious behavior. See 2 Corinthians 8:16-21 for how the apostle Paul was careful to avoid even the appearance of evil. There is a Chinese proverb that says, “When you’re walking in your neighbor’s melon patch, don’t stop to tie your shoe.” You may not be stealing any melons, but it sure looks like it. We need to give careful thought to how others perceive our actions.

A good name is important, but character is what we should seek first and foremost.

What is the difference between reputation and character? Thomas Paine put it this way: “Reputation is what men and women think of us. Character is what God knows about us.” So the first order of business is to please God, to develop the kind of character with which He is pleased, and then the good reputation will follow. You can see this illustrated in 1 Samuel 2:26 (“Samuel grew...in favor both with the Lord and men”) and Luke 2:52 (“Jesus increased...in favor with God and men”).

It is possible to have a good reputation, to be well spoken of by men, but still not be pleasing to God.

This was certainly the case with the church at Sardis: “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Revelation 3:1). The Pharisees did enough to gain a good reputation among many of their fellow-Jews, but they were far from pleasing to God (Matthew 23:23, 25, 28).

Conclusion

So what are we striving for? To have the same thing said about us that was said about Demetrius. Read it carefully. “Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know our testimony is true” (3 John 1:12).