

Endnotes

¹ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel the Key to the Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 295.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, Scripture Press, 1985), p. 1374.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 1361; C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1909, 1967), p. 918, n. 3; Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Regency Library, Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), p. 327; Walvoord, *Daniel*, p. 294.

⁴ *Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1361.

⁵ Walvoord, *Daniel*, pp. 295-96.

⁶ *Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1361.

⁷ Wood, *Daniel*, p. 328.

⁸ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Prophet Daniel* (New York: Our Hope, 1911), p. 207.

⁹ G. Coleman Luck, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), pp. 123-24.

¹⁰ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, Scripture Press, 1985), p. 78.

¹¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 8

"THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE"

by

Dr. Jonathan Pratt, Ph.D.

Associate Pastor, Eden Baptist Church

Adjunct Faculty, Central Baptist Theological Seminary,
Minnesota

When writing to two of his apostolic representatives (Timothy and Titus), Paul provided numerous instructions regarding the doctrine and function of the local church. In regard to the function of the church he chose to provide a list of qualifications necessary for the elders (1 Tim 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9) and deacons (1 Tim 3:8-13). When these three passages are studied in detail, we can relate to Peter's words of consternation in 2 Peter 3:16—Paul writes some things in his letters that are hard to understand. Chief among Paul's challenging words and phrases is the requirement that an elder or deacon be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Although the interpretation of this requirement may appear to be quite obvious, there are no less than six different suggestions offered by commentators in the years since Paul first wrote to Timothy and Titus. The purpose of this article is to offer an interpretation for this uniquely Pauline phrase. I will first lay out the six basic explanations found among interpreters. For each explanation I will include points offered in support followed by arguments advanced against the view. Next I will evaluate the discussion regarding the six views and explain my support for the best one. In the concluding section I will seek to provide some practical applications of the proposed interpretation.

Proposed Interpretations

1. Marriage to the Church

Supporting Arguments. Some Roman Catholic theologians assert that Paul was calling upon elders to be celibate; they were to be "married" to the church (the "one wife"). It is clear that the Catholic doctrine of a celibate clergy motivated this interpretation. It is quite difficult to find any modern-day commentators who hold to this view, and most Catholics would support their view of a celibate clergy without reference to this requirement.

Refutation. This view fails to provide an adequate unmarried it

tion for two main reasons. On the one hand, all of the other qualifications are easily understood in a literal sense, and taking the "wife" figuratively as the church requires an inconsistent interpretive strategy. On the other hand, the qualifications in all three lists include requirements for the proper training of the elder/deacon's children. Clearly, a literal reading of a "husband of one wife" who has children does not permit this particular interpretation to stand.

2. Prohibition of Polygamy.

Supporting Arguments. Since polygamy was a common practice in the ancient Greco-Roman world, several interpreters have suggested that Paul was calling for elders and deacons to have only one wife.² It is true that the Greek phrase here (literally, "one woman man") must at least mean that Paul is requiring marriage to only one woman. Also, the fact that polygamy was an accepted practice among Jews (although it was rarely practiced among Greeks and Romans) would justify a requirement for its prohibition among elders and deacons.

Refutation. When Paul discusses the qualifications for widows who could be included on the "widow list" in 1 Timothy 5:9, he uses the exact same Greek phrase as in 3:2, 12, except that he reverses "man" and "woman" (the phrase reading "one man woman" in Greek is translated as "having been the wife of one man" in the KJV). Since polyandry (having more than one husband) was not practiced in Paul's day, this phrase could not be a prohibition of polyandry, and it is, therefore, unlikely that the same phrase (with only "man" and "woman" reversed) in 3:2, 12, speaks of a prohibition of polygamy.⁴

3. Prohibition of Remarriage.

Supporting Arguments. The majority of early Christian commentators (and some in modern times)⁵ understood this phrase to deny elders and deacons the opportunity for a second marriage, even after the death of the first wife. For various religious and philosophical reasons it was considered meritorious not to marry again after the death of a spouse or a divorce.⁶ In addition Paul appears to applaud the avoidance of second marriages in 1 Corinthians 7 as evidenced by his approval of singleness for widows (v. 40) and his appreciation for periodic sexual abstinence in marriage (vv. 1-7).

Refutation. There is ample historical proof that this view was largely the result of gnostic and ascetic teaching by some church leaders in the ante-Nicene period. These men applauded those who willingly avoided any and all opportunity for sexual relationships.⁸ It seems that the religious and philosophical climate of those days, rather than the intensive study of Scripture, was the impetus behind this view. Also, Paul's encouragement of sexual relations in marriage (1 Cor 7:5) and his general approach to the freedom given believers in Christ (Col 2:20-23; Gal 5:1) show that he would not have approved of ascetic motivations for the qualifications of elders and deacons.

That Paul did not hold to the remarriage view is further demonstrated by his directions to the younger widows in 1 Timothy 5:14 where he encourages them to marry. Such counsel does not fit well if he is excluding remarried widows from getting on the "widow list" in 5:9. Why would Paul encourage younger widows to remarry if this would result in the forfeiture of their spot on the "widow list" later in their lives? In addition, Paul's statements about the dissolution of marriage vows after the death of a spouse (Rom 7:1-3) along with his encouragement to widows to remarry in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 39, appear to fly in the face of an interpretation which pictures him as applauding the prohibition of remarriage.

Furthermore, the Greek phrase, "one man woman" used by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:9 is the same as that found in 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6, except that he reverses "man" and "woman." If his reference to widows does not prohibit remarriage in 1 Timothy 5:9, then it does not prohibit it in the elder/deacon texts either.

Hence, whether a man has remarried following the death of a spouse or following a divorce, the word "one" does not exclude him from being qualified to serve as an elder or deacon. There may be other ways to show that he does not meet the requirements for these offices, but being remarried does not violate the "one woman man" qualification.

4. Prohibition of Unmarried Elders/Deacons.

Supporting Arguments. A strictly literal reading of this qualification is the most significant argument one might use to teach that

men would be prohibited from becoming elders or deacons. This appears to be the reasoning behind the advocacy of married clergy in some branches of the Orthodox church.

Refutation. There are several reasons why this qualification does not exclude unmarried men. First, Paul himself was single (1 Cor 7:8) and was also an elder who laid hands on Timothy at the beginning of Timothy's ministry (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).¹⁰ Second, Paul's commendation of singleness (1 Cor 7:7-8) as a preferred lifestyle and as a special gift from God would be peculiar in light of his apostolic responsibility of overseeing the establishment of elders in the churches he helped to start (Titus 1:5). This type of commendation (for singleness) could serve to defeat the very thing he was called to do as an apostle if unmarried men were prohibited from serving as elders. Third, the adjective "one" (which is the first in this three-word phrase—a place of emphasis) is significant in giving detail about the elder's relationship to his wife. In other words, the adjective exists to make a particular point about the marriage—not to require marriage itself. If Paul had wanted to make marriage a requirement, he would have been more likely to say, "a married man" rather than "one woman man." Fourth, if Paul were requiring elders and deacons to be married, then it would follow that he was also requiring them to have children (the Greek word is plural requiring at least two or more). This would exempt childless men, men with only one child, and men whose children had already left home to establish their own homes.

Thus, it would appear that Paul's use of "one" is not to exclude unmarried men from being elders or deacons. Rather than reading this qualification so literally, I suggest that we understand "one woman man" to implicitly include "if he has a wife."

5. Prohibition of Divorce.

Supporting Arguments. Due to the widespread incidence of divorce in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world, some commentators have suggested that Paul was exempting any divorced person from the office of elder or deacon.¹¹ In addition to this social reason for prohibiting divorced men from office, theological and practical arguments are also given. Theologically, Jesus appears to have prohibited divorce

for all people (Mk 10:2-12).¹² Practically, "extremely embarrassing complications"¹³ are likely to occur for elders or deacons whose former wives and children from other marriages should come to light.

Refutation. All three of the supporting reasons mentioned above fail to convince. Culturally, the practice of divorce among Greeks and Romans was certainly widespread for both husbands and wives in that the women were permitted to divorce their husbands just as easily as husbands were permitted to divorce their wives. However, Jewish women were not afforded this equality of privilege.¹⁴ Only Jewish men could divorce their wives. Since it is very likely that Paul was addressing both Jewish and Gentile widows in his directions about widows in 1 Timothy 5:9, his reference to a "one man woman" would not speak of a prohibition of divorce since divorce was not even an option for the Jewish widows.

Theologically, Christ does appear to make exceptions to his prohibition of divorce in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:8-9. Likewise, Paul appears to allow for the divorce of a saved man or woman if his or her unbelieving spouse departs (1 Cor 7:15). While divorce is never the most acceptable course of action and is not the intention of God for marriage, these examples from the teaching of Christ and Paul do not appear to prove that any and all divorce is sinful.

In response to the practical argument given, one might well argue that "extremely embarrassing complications" could develop in regard to any number of past sins that a potential elder or deacon may have committed. We can imagine scenarios including the appearance of old drinking buddies or someone formerly assaulted by an elder or deacon. Certainly, these would also be embarrassing situations to face. This whole point about past actions points to the *present* nature of all of the qualifications. I will say more about this under the next viewpoint.

6. Marital Fidelity to One Wife.

Supporting Arguments. Advocates of this view believe that the best way to translate "one woman man" in Paul's three lists is "faithful to his wife."¹⁵ Thus, Paul is requiring elders and deacons to be demon-

strably committed to their wives. While this view assumes the prohibition of polygamy and all sexual infidelity, it is not concerned with the issues of remarriage or divorce. The emphasis of the requirement is placed, rather, upon the present state of the marriage in which the elder or deacon finds himself. There are four lines of support that can be given for this viewpoint.

(1) The Current Status of the Candidate. All of the requirements for elders and deacons emphasize the man's *current* qualification to serve. Undoubtedly many of the candidates for elder and deacon came from backgrounds of horrible sin (e.g. 1 Cor 6:9-11) and would be disqualified if these requirements were meant to look backward to pre-salvation or even distant post-salvation activities. This observation would seem to allow for past adulterous activity just as it might for past drunkenness, dishonesty, disorganization, or selfish behavior. We should ask why a past sin like divorce should have present ramifications on a man's qualification for ministry, when none of the other qualifications is viewed in this backward-looking manner.

(2) The Parallel Phrase in 1 Timothy 5:9. One of the best ways to determine an author's meaning is to compare his phrase in one verse with other places in his writing where that same phrase occurs. The Pauline phrase "one woman man" occurs only three times (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6) in the elder and deacon qualification lists. But the phrase does appear in 1 Timothy 5:9 with the "woman" and "man" terms juxtaposed. Thus, we may be able to gain significant help in our interpretation of "one woman man" by comparing it to Paul's usage of "one man woman" in 1 Timothy 5:9.

1 Timothy 5:9 includes this phrase as one of the qualifications of widows who should be included on the "widow list." We have already argued above that this phrase could not be referring to a prohibition of polyandry (a practice unknown in the culture of that day), a prohibition of remarriage (since this would contradict Paul's counsel in 5:14), or to a prohibition of divorce (since Jewish women could not divorce their husbands). Our only remaining option is to understand Paul's meaning to refer to marital fidelity in 1 Timothy 5:9. Thus, we

must be consistent in our interpretation of this same phrase (with only the "man" and "woman" terms reversed) when used in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6.

(3) The Positive Nature of the Qualification. In each of the three lists the requirements are normally presented as positive qualities rather than as negative statements. In the elder list of 1 Timothy 3:2-7 they appear as follows: blameless, one woman man, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent,¹⁶ gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, rules house well, trains children well, not a novice, and has a good testimony. The list includes eleven positive qualifications and five negative ones. The phrase speaking of marital fidelity is in the middle of positive qualities.

In the deacon list of 1 Timothy 3:8-12 we find the following: reverent, not deceitful, not given to wine, not greedy, holds to the mystery of the faith, proved (tested), blameless, one woman man, rules children and household well. Of the nine qualifications listed here, only three are in the negative, and "one woman man" appears in the middle of positive statements.

In the elder list of Titus 1:6-9 there are sixteen qualifications listed: blameless, one woman man, has faithful children, blameless, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy, hospitable, lover of good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holds fast to the Word. Five of the sixteen are negative in nature, and our phrase is included in the middle of positive requirements.

Though the force of this argument may not be as strong as the first two, it is still a reality that fidelity to one's wife is a positive statement in regard to the qualities required for elders and deacons. In all three passages the majority of the qualifications are positive, and "one woman man" is always found in between other positive requirements. Of the eighteen negative statements, all but two have the Greek negative particle, and the two which do not (1 Tim 3:3 - not quarrelsome and not covetous) have the Greek negative prefix attached to them. Of course, "one woman man" has no such indication from the Greek language that would require a negative interpretation (e.g. not

divorced). *It is quite clear that Paul could easily have said "not divorced," if that is what he intended. But instead, he provided a positive statement of expectation: a man should be faithful to his wife ("one woman man").*

(4) The High Calling of the Phrase. The nature of the qualifications for elders and deacons establish standards of high moral excellence. Being faithful to one's own wife creates the type of high standard Paul aimed at in providing these requirements. It would appear that a significantly lower standard would exist if anyone who was not remarried, not married to more than one spouse, or not divorced could qualify. However, the pool of acceptable candidates would be significantly reduced if "one woman man" refers to the need to be devoted emotionally, physically, and mentally to one's own wife. By understanding the phrase in this manner, there would likely be many undivorced, once-married, and monogamous men who could not qualify because they would fail to be devoted to their wives as God intended.¹⁷

Refutation. The strongest refutations that can be generated against this view are that it is too "obvious"¹⁸ and that it "squeezes more out of the Greek than it will bear."¹⁹ Aside from such terse statements, there is little of substantive discussion that has been rendered in regard to this viewpoint.

Evaluation of the Interpretations

Based upon the preceding investigation, the reader can rightly assume that I support the sixth interpretation. It has the strongest arguments in its favor and has not received any significant refutations that oppose it.

Whenever we approach a difficult text of Scripture, our goal is to seek the most likely interpretation the original writer intended his readers²⁰ to understand. The "obvious" sense (to use Hanson's terminology)²¹ is normally to be employed, particularly when there is no textual or theological reason for doing otherwise. Paul's requirement that elders and deacons be faithful to their wives would certainly appear to be a straightforward interpretation of this phrase. This point clearly reveals the inadequacy of the figurative interpretation offered by the "marriage to the church" view.

Cultural practice can be helpful in leading to the understanding of certain phrases in the Bible. This has been quite clear in our discussion of widows in 1 Timothy 5. The incidence of polyandry and divorce in the ancient world helped to shed light on the meaning of "one man woman" in 1 Timothy 5:9. In turn, the wise hermeneutical rule of comparing similar phrases with one another in an author's letter helped to shed light on "one woman man" in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12. By following this particular rule, the remarriage, divorce, and polygamous views were deemed unlikely.

Even though there is little support for the "prohibition of unmarried elders/ deacons" view, the wise practice of studying other passages in Paul's writing related to singleness and eldership helped to steer us away from holding to such a literalistic interpretation.

I believe that these observations coupled with the four lines of support offered above for the "fidelity" view strongly demonstrate that Paul's requirement for elders and deacons is that they be faithful to their wives.

Conclusion

The qualifications for church office given by Paul provide a high standard for any who would seek to become an elder or deacon. I have sought to look into the interpretation of just one of these requirements ("one woman man"). Although several interpretive suggestions have been made through the centuries, it appears that the fidelity to one's wife view best answers the questions related to this phrase.

Being faithful to one's wife requires an elder or deacon to be sexually faithful to his wife. Recalling the words of Christ in Matthew 5:27–30, we must understand that faithfulness to one's spouse is not merely physical but also mental and emotional. Paul calls upon husbands to love and cherish their wives and to be wholeheartedly devoted to them alone (Eph 5:25–33; Col 3:19). Thus, when seeking to ascertain whether a potential elder or deacon meets this qualification, the following questions would certainly be appropriate: Does this man show positive demonstrations of love and faithfulness to his wife? Does this man protect and care for his wife? Does this man demonstrate that his wife is important to him? Are there any indications of unconcern toward his

wife, distraction from paying attention to her, or flirtatious behavior toward other women?

This call to marital fidelity is a call to concentrate on a man's present relationship with his wife. Fitness for ministry is largely determined by this type of present assessment. However, the interpretation offered here should not be seen as an advocacy of divorce or as an attempt to argue for the acceptance of divorced men as elders or deacons. Paul's call for blamelessness in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 certainly includes some assessment of past behavior. This qualification may well disqualify divorced persons from serving as elders, but that is a discussion for another article.

What is affirmed here is that Paul's reference to a "one woman man" is not a prohibition of polygamy nor of unmarried, remarried, or divorced men from becoming elders or deacons. It is a call to marital fidelity, a call to elders and deacons to love their wives with passion, patience, and exclusiveness. Everyone who sees an elder or deacon with his wife should have no question that this man is a "one woman man." May God give us men who fulfill this qualification with distinction.

¹There are five different Greek words (episkopos, presbyteros, didaskalos, poimen, and kerux) used in the NT to describe the office of pastor in the local church. Many English words are used to translate these terms (e.g. bishop, overseer, president, teacher, shepherd, preacher, pastor, elder, administrator, etc.). I have chosen to use the term "elder" as a designation for this office, but any number of these other terms could certainly be used.

²Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* (Cambridge: n.p., 1619; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980), 89-96; D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 65; and idem., "Titus" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 430.

³Craig S. Keener, "Marriage," *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 683.

⁴George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and

W. Ward Gasque (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992*), 158.

⁵J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: A & C Black, 1963; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 75-76.

⁶Ibid., 75. According to Kelly, there are ample Jewish and Gentile literary and funerary inscriptions that reveal this attitude in the first century.

⁷Ibid., 75-76.

⁸Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980), 420-27.

⁹Fairbairn, 140. It is difficult, however, to substantiate this as a common practice in the present.

¹⁰Unless there was more than one situation when Timothy received his gift for ministry through the laying on of hands, then these two verses (1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6) must be referring to the same event when Paul and the other elders laid their hands on Timothy.

¹¹Representatives of this view include Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 125-26, and A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 75, 78.

¹²Hanson, 78.

¹³Kent, 125.

¹⁴Craig S. Keener, "Adultery, Divorce," *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 6.

¹⁵Knight, 158-59; Fairbairn, 138-41; Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 80-81; Robert Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 171-73; I. Howard Marshall with Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 156-57, 478; and Robert L. Saucy, "The Husband of One Wife," *BibSac* 131 (1974): 229-40.

¹⁶There is a textual variant at this point in some Greek manuscripts where the two-word phrase (me aischrōkerde) "not greedy for money" is included. But this is not found in the overwhelming majority of Greek manuscripts. Since this qualification is found in Titus 1:7,

seems likely to have been inserted by later scribes who were trying to make it parallel with Titus.

¹⁷Saucy, 239.

¹⁸Hanson, 77.

¹⁹Kelly, 75.

²⁰Along with the great majority of scholars who have studied the pastoral epistles, I am assuming that Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus were intended not only for them individually but also for their constituents.

²¹Hanson, 77.

by

Dr. Dave Jaspers

President, Maranatha Baptist Bible College

Motives influence us all. Whether they are negative, or positive in their nature, we all respond to motives. The ultimate motive for every action of the child of God ought be our great love for our matchless Savior. As Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." In typical Pauline fashion we are reminded of the great substitutionary sacrifice on Calvary and our response of appreciative love for the One who died in our place. It is interesting to notice that the same passage, which teaches us of the motive of love for the Savior, also touches on another overwhelming motivation, the future judgment seat of Christ. Beginning in verse 9 we read, "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted in him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." (2 Corinthians 5:9-11)

This chapter begins with an amazing comparison. It is a comparison of that which I experience in this life, endeavoring to serve God in this body; as compared to the experience I will some day enjoy in the presence of God in a glorified body. Describing serving God in this body, the Apostle called it a tabernacle (verse 1). Don't get too excited at the use of the word, "tabernacle." It really means "tent house." Not very glamorous when you think about it!

When I was a boy, my buddies and I all bought "pup" tents. Do you know what a pup tent is? It is a small two-man tent, although you would never catch me sharing it with another man! That would be too close of fellowship for me! We used to strap our tents onto the handlebars of our bicycles and pedal out south of town to spend the night in a farmer's field near a small creek. It seemed that no matter how careful I was, I always managed to set my tent right over the root of a nearby tree.