

# Destin Church of Christ

Fall, 2018

## Lessons from I & II Timothy and Titus

### Lesson 6 – “*Roles in the Church: Elders & Deacons*” – Part 2

**Texts:** I Tim 3:1-13; 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-9

We need to question our motives in favoring any particular interpretation. Some, in the name of grace or convenience, will wish to lower the bar and make it easier for people to qualify as elders. Others, in the name of truth or resisting compromise, will wish to raise the bar and make it more difficult to qualify. Our backgrounds and personalities tend to drive our interpretive preferences. We should avoid coming up with a smorgasbord of possible interpretations, only to then choose the one we want according to our tastes.

We should discipline ourselves neither to make the passage more inclusive nor less inclusive than God does. Our job is to let the text say what it says, regardless of how difficult or unpopular it may make our job of applying it. The text may be more exclusive than we wish, or it may be more inclusive than we wish. Scripture is not written to back up our preferences. Let's be sure we adjust to Scripture, rather than adjusting it to us.

#### I. Moral Character:

1 Timothy 3:2-3 deals with moral character.

- “Faithful to his Wife” (“One Woman Man”) (“Husband of one Wife”)

His blamelessness is first of all identified by this characteristic. He is to be “*faithful to his wife*” (NIV) or a “*one woman man*”. The KJV and ESV both say, “*The husband of one wife.*”

The traditional interpretation suggests that it means you can't be a polygamist. You can't have more than one wife. That is not what it's talking about.

You couldn't even be a member of the church if you had more than one wife, let alone a church leader. This is not Old Testament time, this is Roman time. The Romans didn't have polygamist marriages. Among the Jews, polygamy was not tolerated either. He's not talking about polygamy here.

Somebody says, "*The husband of one wife means you could never have a second wife.*" That is not what the text originally says. It's speaking about character, not marital status.

***"Are we saying that someone who had married a second wife could never be an elder in the church?"*** No, because there are some terms in Scripture by which God not only permits but honors a second marriage.

1 Timothy 5:14: "I counsel younger widows to marry..."

1 Corinthians 7:39: "...if her husband dies, she is free to marry..."

1 Corinthians 7:8-9: "To the unmarried (widowers) and the widows... they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

It is not a blanket statement forbidding anyone married a second time from serving in a ministry. God honors a second marriage in the case of the death of a first partner.

***"Well maybe it means divorced people."*** If that was the intention, then all Paul would have had to say was this is to be a man who has never been divorced.

There are Greek words for divorce, including those used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, but Paul does not use them here. If he were trying to say "not divorced" in the same way that he means "not quarrelsome" and "not a drunkard" in 1 Timothy 3:3, why not simply use a word he uses elsewhere, and be done with it? The phrase: "*He must not be divorced*" exists in the Greek language, and is familiar to Paul. If it really means "not divorced," why use ambiguous language when it's possible to say exactly what he means, especially since most of the other qualifications are specific.

But it doesn't say a man who has never been divorced. The Bible teaches that remarriage after a divorce is within the will of God, under some circumstances.

Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 clearly state that remarriage after a divorce is permissible in the instance of "marital unfaithfulness."

The word "Unmarried" is used 3 other times in 1 Corinthians 7 (11, 32, and 34), and does not appear to be associated with widows or widowers. There are some who believe it is referring to those who are divorced, since when it refers to those who have never been married, the word "virgin" is used.

A remarriage in and of itself is not a sin. If a person was widowed and remarried, or if a person was the innocent party in a divorce where the other person was an unrepentant adulterer, a remarriage is not a sin. If an unbeliever departed, a remarriage is not a sin.

We should not ruin someone's life by saying that their second marriage in itself was sinful.

The point is not that Paul is saying no one can ever be in church leadership who has ever been previously married, because there are tolerances within that. If he wanted to be explicit about that he would have said it another way.

***"You mean to tell me that if a person was married and their wife was an adulteress, and wouldn't repent, and she just took off, that he's still free to be an overseer?"*** That's not the issue here, but would become an issue in another part of this section. Look at 1 Timothy 3:4-5. If you've got a divorce situation, even on legitimate biblical grounds, even fitting Matthew 5 or 1 Corinthians 7, you're going to have to test this man on this, too. Was that divorce or did that divorce really betray an inability of that man to lead his household properly? That's another test you'd have to apply.

There is no issue brought up about a first or second marriage.

The issue here is not marital status. It is not marital circumstance.

*What kind of moral qualification is it to be married to one woman?* We probably know people who are married to one woman, been married to the same woman all their life and they aren't qualified to do anything. There are other people who have only been married to one woman all their life but they are always thinking about a lot of other women than the one they're married to. That isn't the issue.

If you say this means a man could only have one wife, you have just taken it out of the realm of moral qualification and you've made it marital status. You can be a man married to one woman for 50 years and all 50 of those years not have been a one woman man. Being married to one woman doesn't qualify you for anything except for a pat on the back. We're talking about moral qualifications.

The issue here is a one-woman man. What that means is a man devoted to one woman in his heart and in his mind.

When we look at the general question of whether a divorced man should ever serve as an elder, this matter is covered in Paul's first qualification of 1 Timothy 3:2. Being above reproach means that there is nothing for which one can be accused or blamed.

There may be circumstances which render him as not above reproach in the eyes of the church's leadership and/or the congregation.

Divorce oftentimes is a stigma, and it has tragically become a stigmatic reproach for many. God's grace can cover the sin, but the consequences sometimes do have lasting effects.

Regardless of the specifics of any one situation, the general principle is this: Does he enjoy the complete and full affirmation of the leaders and people of his own congregation, and is he presently living out the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? If a particular local church scrutinizes his life and ministry and sees nothing in his present character or past conduct that brings a reproach, he may serve as an elder in that place.

***“Must an elder (overseer) of a church be married?”***

There is a question whether or not Paul is requiring that all church elders be married, since he himself was not married, and refers to himself as a member of the eldership. (1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, 11)

Since he seems to function over pastors and elders, authoritatively leading them, it's hard to argue that Paul was not elder-qualified. (Acts 23:1-6)

On this topic, these Church of Christ theologians positions were:

- Yes - H. Leo Boles, J.W. McGarvey, Guy N. Woods.
- No - David Lipscomb, J.C. McQuiddy, Robert Milligan.
- Better married - G.C. Brewer.

Next Week – “Roles in the Church: Elders & Deacons” – Part 3

(Moral Character – “Temperate”, “Not given to drunkenness”, “Sober-minded”, “Given to hospitality”, “Apt to teach”, “Not covetous”)