

## Husband of One Wife

The debate over the Qualification associated with Bishop and Deacon stated as “Husband of One Wife” centers around the question of divorce. All parties agree that the provision excludes polygamy. Some contest that re-marriage after a wife dies is not allowed. But, the primary disagreement revolves around the issue of divorce. The arguments associated with allowing divorced men to serve in this office draw their primary strength from the fact that divorce is not an unforgivable sin and therefore should not permanently disqualify an individual. The idea being that all men would require Grace to be able to meet qualification, since all have sinned. Why then would this particular sin carry with it a life sentence the others do not? Further, the argument draws comparisons between persons of the bible, the things they did, and their relationship to God and uses these as validation of the argument. A few observations should be noted associated with these discussions:

- 1) The arguments make a good point about the role of Grace within qualification. Without it, none could qualify.
- 2) Divorce is not an unpardonable sin and we have to be very careful not to allow this topic to create that kind of mentality or overshadowing.
- 3) There was a very distinct division in the vintage of the arguments. In general, the new vintage “theologians” argue disqualification for polygamy only, while the older vintage hold fast to the traditional interpretation. It’s impossible not to suspect a cultural influence in this comparison.
- 4) Comparisons between persons in the bible were not like for like. You can’t compare the roles people held as equivalent. A prophet and a king under God have very different purposes.
- 5) Arguments which referred to historical bases had little to no factual credibility. Many were based off assumptions or hear-say evidence of historical culture, rather than citing sources to ensure authenticity and accuracy.
- 6) The arguments primarily focused on the character of the person, rather than the purpose and image of the Office.

It will be helpful to be aware of these observations as we discuss the issue to ensure we don’t fall prey to the same traps.

The issue really boils down to a one question. Why would God (assuming the traditional interpretation is correct) permanently disqualify a divorced man from holding the Office of Deacon or Bishop? Since the question revolves around marriage and divorce, it’s logical that the answer would be found from a study of Scripture concerning these areas. However, before we begin, we need to make sure we prepare ourselves prayerfully. This is not merely a matter of debate. There is no “conservative” answer to the question. Erroring on either side has significant consequences. It’s not about finding a “safe” position or even a “reasonable” position. It’s about finding the Right position – God’s position. Anything less will result in condemnation from either defiling the Office, or frustrating Grace through legalistic dogma.

These are the Headship Offices of the Church. As the Head moves, so does the Body. Spiritual accuracy determines the Fate of the Church.

### **Marriage:**

Marriage is a Covenant. All Covenants have 3 basic elements:

- 1) A statement of Conditions and Consequences
- 2) Witnesses
- 3) A Seal

The statement of conditions and consequences is found in the marriage vow. The conditions of the vow are “until death do us part”. The witnesses are the attendants – the groom’s and the bride’s (that’s why there are sides). They are there to ensure the vow is honored. The seal is in consummation. This is why sexual immorality is such a big deal with God. Marriage paints a picture of Christ and the Church. We are betrothed to Christ. One day He will return and take His Bride to His Father’s house. There, the marriage ceremony and feast will occur. The Bible starts with a marriage and ends with a marriage. The following are some key passages.

**[Note: to conserve space, only the first and last verse of the passages are included below. Please take the time to look up and read them for yourselves in fully.]**

Genesis 2:24

(One flesh relationship)

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Numbers 30:1-16 NKJV

(A man is bound by his oath, a woman’s oath is binding unless her Head nullifies it)

If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Ephesians 5:22-32

(Marriage was given to us to teach us about Christ and the Church, not the other way around)

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Matthew 27:51

(Marital Intimacy parallels the intimacy of Man and God, made possible by the Cross)

“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,”

## Divorce:

Next, we need to look at divorce. This is a place where we must be careful. Theological Liberalism (interpreting scripture based on current cultural norms) can have a significant impact and even distort our understanding of God and this relationship to his People and Bride. Let's start with the Law, which shows us God's Character and intent.

Deuteronomy 22:13-30

(Laws concerning infidelity in the marriage process – betrothal and matrimony)

““If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her,  
“A man shall not take his father's wife, nor uncover his father's bed.”

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

(Law concerning divorce)

““When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,  
then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

There are several take-aways that we must highlight from the passage to properly understand the concepts of marriage and divorce:

- 1) Headship of a woman changes from her father to her husband at marriage.
- 2) The marriage process begins at betrothal, not matrimony.
- 3) Marriage is a life-long covenant, ended at death.
- 4) Betrothal is binding.
- 5) Adultery is punishable by death.
- 6) Sexual immorality during betrothal carries similar consequences.
- 7) Divorce is during the betrothal period, death is the punishment after matrimony.
- 8) Divorce is only allowed for sexual immorality.
- 9) Once divorced and then married, there can be no return to the former husband.

It is also helpful to look at God's perspective on marriage and divorce in both the old and new testament.

Matthew 5:31-32

(Marriage is Sacred and Binding)

“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

Matthew 19:3-12

(Teaching on divorce. What God joins together, let no man separate.)

“The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

Malachi 2:16

(God’s attitude toward divorce)

““For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one’s garment with violence,” Says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously.””

Jeremiah 3:1-8

(God divorces Israel – in the betrothal)

“And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.”

I Corinthians 7:10-16

(Principles of marriage- believe or not.)

“But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”

[Note: In these passages, Paul states for an unbeliever that if they will not stay, let them go. That a believer is not bound in such cases. The context is in departure/separation, not divorce.]

Hebrews 13:4 NKJV

(Unilateral condition of the marriage covenant)

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

The Scripture associated with marriage and divorce leads you to a few conclusions.

- 1) God chose marriage, from Creation, as His choice method of depicting His relationship to us.
- 2) The marriage covenant is a life vow, which is honorable among ALL.
- 3) Divorce was granted to the Israelites, as a concession, due to the hardness of their hearts and is applicable in the betrothal period ONLY in the case of sexual immorality.
- 4) Marriage is the picture of Christ and the Church in the New Testament.
- 5) Grace calls the Believer to a higher level of commitment to the marriage covenant.

There are several historical items that are related to this topic as well. The requirements that were placed on the Old Testament Priests were very similar to the Qualification of the New Testament Pastor. Where the Old Testament speaks of physical attributes, the New Testament speaks to Spiritual attributes.

Leviticus 21:13-15 NKJV

And he shall take a wife in her virginity. 14 A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife.

The study of the Greek associated with these also gives clues. Literally translated, the phrase is Man One Woman. Many have paraphrased that as a “One Woman Man” and this is literally correct. However, the word translated ONE is also translated ONLY and FIRST. The context of the word is not simply singular, as one at a time, but more perfectly ONLY ONE. Additionally, according to the Bible Knowledge Commentary, the phrase was understood in the writings of bible commentators from 100-200 AD to mean not a polygamist, not divorced, not promiscuous, but also not widowed and remarried. The bases for the last phrase was sited more as a character weakness in needing to remarry, rather than a disqualification associated with sin. A Widower who remarries is still the husband of only ONE wife. The marriage covenant ends at death. In the resurrection, she is not his wife and therefore when he marries again, he only has one wife. This is explained by Jesus in the following text.

Matthew 22:29-30

Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.

When you put all this together, the issue around “Husband of One Wife” becomes more about a picture of the Church than it is about the character of any man. The Office is greater than any individual who holds it. If divorce is allowed to be dismissed as a limitation of qualification, then the image displayed by the position becomes contrary to the scriptures associated with marriage, divorce, and Christ’s relationship to the church. But again, you still have to ask the question, would God, permanently disqualify someone who has been forgiven. The answer, based on scripture, is yes. We have to remember that forgiveness does not negate consequence. Even though God forgives our sin, our choices can permanently “disqualify” us from doing certain things for God. Two scriptural examples follow:

Numbers 20:1-13

““Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.”

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.””

II Samuel 7:13

“He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

I Chronicles 28:3

“But God said to me, ‘You shall not build a house for My name, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood.’”

Moses was not allowed to enter the Promise Land in his life, because he ruined the image God was creating when he indignantly struck the rock with the stick instead of speaking to it. Moses was forgiven and walked closer to God than any other man. However, this one choice that effected God's “image” created a life long restriction. Likewise, David, because he was a man of war and not peace, was not allowed to build God’s Temple. Even though David’s character could be argued to be better than Solomon’s, it was not the picture God wanted to paint and therefore he was not allowed. Similarly, God forgave David of his sin, but he still killed his baby son.

### **Wrapping up:**

I think it prudent to pause here and restate something. Divorce is not an unforgivable sin. Just like any sin, it can be forgiven. The Qualification of Deacons and Elders is not in any way saying that the man who is divorced has less character than a man who is not. I know many divorced men who display incredible character, love for God, and commitment to His Church. What the qualification ultimately says is that because of the choices you made in your life, you can’t paint the picture that God is trying to paint in this particular instance. David was still a man after God’s heart, even though he couldn’t build the temple. Moses was still God’s man, even though he couldn’t enter the Promise Land. God still used them for His Purposes.

When you look at the world around us, marriage and family have suffered a tremendous blow. The divorce rate within the church is 62%. It’s hard to find anyone not impacted by the condition. And where the church must extend compassion, we also must acknowledge the purposeful war that is being waged against this institution. We now live in a culture that accepts divorce as simply another life situation. It has become common place, even “normal”. Coupled with the attempts to redefine marriage to incorporate homosexuality further shows the state of the present age. These are not simply events, it is a purposeful and calculated attack by the enemy. If marriage is compromised, the understanding of the Image of God, of Salvation, even the very nature of Christ is changed.

Based on the research listed above, I confidently believe the traditional interpretation of this qualification stands. “Husband of one wife” excludes divorce, polygamy, and promiscuity. Furthermore, the qualification of the Office is about depicting Christ's Image, not the character of the person who fills it. As a Church, we need to lift up this office, not the people in it. We need to put marriage in the place of reverence it deserves, instead of accepting the current state. The Qualifications associated with these two Offices do not belong to us. They belong to Christ. We don't have the authority to change them. But, we do have the responsibility to evaluate them properly. Instead of redefining the standard to suit the present culture where unqualified men are neither willing or able to fill the Office, we need to focus on fixing the real problem and raising up the next generation in the nurture and admiration of the Lord.