

Qualifications of Deacons

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1 Timothy 3:12 ... Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. (KJV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. (NKJV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. (NASB)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. (ASV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... Church officers must be faithful in marriage. They must be in full control of their children and everyone else in their home. (CEV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. (ESV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. (NIV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; (NRSV)

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife (KJV); Let deacons be the husbands of one wife (NKJV); Deacons must be husbands of only one wife (NASB)

This passage can be understood in two distinct ways: (1) the numerically-oriented view, or, (2) the morally-oriented view.

The first view is numerically-oriented, and affirms that deacons can be married only once. Several modern versions, the NASB, NIV and NRSV, seemingly support this position. Accordingly, widowers or divorced persons who remarry are excluded from offices of leadership or service.

1 Timothy 3:12 ... Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. (NASB)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. (NIV)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; (NRSV)

The second view is morally-oriented, and affirms that deacons must live in harmony with God's laws concerning marriage. Accordingly, widowers or divorced persons who remarry are not automatically excluded from offices of leadership or service.

Which view is correct? Which approach is right? Which interpretation most accurately reflects the value system of the New Testament? Hopefully, a diligent and detailed study of the text will provide an answer.

First let us examine the original language of 1st Timothy 3:12. The Greek text, “διάκονοι ἔστωσαν μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες,” is parsed as follows: The noun διάκονοι, the subject of the sentence, is masculine, plural, nominative, from διάκονος, meaning “servants, ministers, deacons.” The verb of the sentence, ἔστωσαν, is third person, plural, present, active, imperative, from εἶμί, meaning, “they must be.” The adjective μιᾶς is feminine, singular, genitive, from εἷς, μία, ἓν, signifying the primary number “one.” The noun γυναικὸς is feminine, singular, genitive [signifying possession], from γυνή, meaning “of a woman/wife.” The noun ἄνδρες is masculine, plural, nominative, from ἀνήρ, meaning “men/husbands.” **Literally, a deacon is a man/husband who belongs to one woman/wife.**

Similar language is found in 1 Timothy 3:2, which says that a bishop/overseer must be “*the husband of one wife...*” (cf. Titus 1:6). The Greek reads “μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα.” The adjective μιᾶς is feminine, singular, genitive, from εἷς, μία, ἓν, a primary number, signifying “one.” The noun γυναικὸς is feminine, singular, genitive, from γυνή, meaning “a wife” or “a woman.” The noun ἄνδρα is masculine, singular, accusative, from ἀνήρ, meaning “a man.” **Literally, a bishop/overseer must be “a one woman man,” i.e., a man/husband who belongs to one woman/wife.**

1 Timothy 3:2 ... 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (NASB)

Titus 1:6 ... 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. (NASB)

Consider also 1 Timothy 5:9, which says, “*A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man.*” The Greek construction is parallel: “ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή.” The noun γυνή is feminine, singular, nominative, from γυνή, meaning “a woman,” or “a wife.” The nominative case indicates that γυνή [a woman] is the subject of this phrase. The noun ἀνδρὸς is masculine, singular, genitive, from ἀνήρ, meaning, “of a man, of a

husband.” Here the genitive case indicates possession. The adjective ἐνὸς is masculine, singular, genitive, from εἷς, μία, ἓν, a primary number, signifying “one.” **To be eligible for enrollment as a widow indeed, the woman under consideration must literally have been “a one man woman,” i.e., a woman/wife who belonged to one man/husband.**

1 Timothy 5:9 ... 9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, (NASB)

Does this language automatically eliminate widowers or scripturally-divorced persons who have scripturally remarried from serving as elders or deacons? Some would answer “Yes.” Others, self included, would answer “No.”

A Compelling Comparison

A numerically-oriented interpretation of 1st Timothy Chapter 3 leads to difficulties when the same principles are applied to the parallel text in Chapter 5. Is remarriage for a widow/widower so morally questionable that it automatically disqualifies one from spiritual service (3:2, 12) or ongoing financial support (5:9)? The two passages are identical in wording, and their sense is entirely the same. We can get nothing out of the one that is not contained in the other. Where in all of Scripture is remarriage for a widower or a widow either prohibited or regarded as a reflection on one’s morality? Would Paul have advised younger widows to marry again, as he did in 5:14, if doing so meant they would forfeit the right which is extended in 5:9?

1 Timothy 3:2 ... 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (NASB)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. (NASB)

1 Timothy 5:9-10 ... 9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. (NASB)

1 Timothy 5:14 ... 14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; (NASB)

Consider the following alternative explanation, which focuses on moral rather than numeric considerations: The emphasis on “one wife’s husband” indicates that an elder/deacon has no relationship with any woman other than his lawfully married wife. He must be married, and he must be faithful to his marriage vows. He is not guilty of sexual promiscuity, moral laxity, polygamy, or unscriptural divorce and remarriage.

Paul had a reason for saying that a elder/deacon must be “one wife’s husband.” These offices of leadership and service were reserved for men who were married and had families. Furthermore, high moral character was required.

The apostolic message repeatedly stressed the need for sexual purity. This was an especially egregious problem among the Gentiles, with their temple prostitutes, female companions, etc. Therefore, regarding bishops/overseers and deacons, any man who was not strictly faithful to his wife was disqualified.

Someone might ask, “Why, if Paul had in mind sexual purity, did he not use language that prohibited fornication or adultery? By demanding that elders and deacons be “above reproach,” he does this very thing (1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7). However, in the context of 1st Timothy 3:2 and 3:12, Paul sets forth the positive qualifications of an elder/deacon with great exactness.

1 Timothy 3:10 ... 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. (NASB)

Titus 1:6-7 ... 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, (NASB)

1 Timothy 3:2 ... 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (NASB)

1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. (NASB)

Morally-pure single young men are not guilty of fornication or adultery. However, they are not qualified to serve as elders or deacons. Both offices require that the candidate has proven himself by having fulfilled the domestic qualifications relating to family, wife and children.

How does this relate to a man who loses his wife to death and subsequently remarries? A widower who has scripturally remarried belongs to one woman – his present and scriptural wife. How does this relate to a man who divorces his wife for the cause of fornication and marries another woman? If he is scripturally divorced and remarried, he is no longer bound to his first spouse. The prior bond has been severed. He is free to remarry. He is now rightly joined to one woman – his present and scriptural wife (cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9; Rom. 7:1-4; etc.).

Matthew 5:32 ... 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (NASB)

Matthew 19:3-9 ... 3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” 4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” 7 They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” 8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 “And I say to you, whoever

divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”
(NASB)

Romans 7:1-4 ... 1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (NASB)

Consider the Biblical concept of a bond. The Greek word *deō*, rendered “bound” in Romans 7:2, means “to tie, bind” [Thomas #1210]. BDAG defines it as “(1) to confine a person or thing by various kinds of restraints, bind, tie; (a) of things (Matt. 13:30; John 11:44); (b) of binding and imprisoning persons (Acts 12:6; 21:11); (2) to tie something to something, tie to an animal (Matt. 21:2; Rev. 9:14); (3) to constrain by law and duty, bind to someone: of a wife to her husband (Rom. 7:2); of a husband to his wife (1 Cor. 7:27)...”

*Romans 7:2 ... 2 For the married woman is ***bound** by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.*
(NASB)

*Matthew 13:30 ... 30 ‘Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First ***gather** up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ” (NASB)*

*John 11:44 ... 44 The man who had died came forth, ***bound** hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (NASB)*

*Acts 12:6 ... 6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, ***bound** with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. (NASB)*

*Acts 21:11 ... 11 And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and ***bound** his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’ ” (NASB)*

*Matthew 21:2 ... 2 saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey ***tied** there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. (NASB)*

*Revelation 9:14 ... 14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are ***bound** at the great river Euphrates.” (NASB)*

*Romans 7:2 ... 2 For the married woman is ***bound** by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. (NASB)*

*1 Corinthians 7:27 ... 27 Are you ***bound** to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. (NASB)*

Ruling their children and their own houses well (KJV & NKJV); And good managers of their children and their own households (NASB)

The Greek word *proistēmi*, translated “ruling” (KJV) or “good managers” (NASB), occurs 8x in the NT (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4; 3:5; 3:12; 5:17; Titus 3:8, 14). Thomas says it means “to put before, to set over, to rule” [4291b]. BDAG say it means “(1) to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head; (2) to have an interest in, show concern for, care for, give aid.”

*Romans 12:8 ... 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who ***leads**, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (NASB)*

*1 Thessalonians 5:12 ... 12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and ***have *charge *over** you in the Lord and give you instruction, (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 3:4 ... 4 He must be one who ***manages** his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 3:5 ... 5 (but if a man does not know how to ***manage** his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good ***managers** of their children and their own households. (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 5:17 ... 17 The elders who ***rule** well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (NASB)*

*Titus 3:8 ... 8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to ***engage** in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. (NASB)*

*Titus 3:14 ... 14 Our people must also learn to ***engage** in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. (NASB)*

This word describes the work of spiritual leadership (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Thess. 5:12-13), with specific application to elders (1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:12).

Romans 12:6-8 ... 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his

*faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who ***leads**, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (NASB)*

*1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 ... 12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and ***have *charge *over** you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 3:4-5 ... 4 He must be one who ***manages** his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to ***manage** his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 5:17 ... 17 The elders who ***rule** well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good ***managers** of their children and their own households. (NASB)*

Domestic orderliness and parental control is required of both elders and deacons (cf. vs 4-5, 12). However, in contrast with the familial qualifications of elders (Titus 1:5-6), nothing is said about the children of deacons being “believers.” This would allow for an obvious difference in age and experience between elders and deacons. Elders, by definition are older; deacons may come from a younger class of men. While elders’ children are believers, those of deacons may not have reached the age of accountability. However, in both cases, good management skills on the part of the elder or deacon must be evidenced.

*1 Timothy 3:4-5 ... 4 He must be one who ***manages** his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to ***manage** his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), (NASB)*

*1 Timothy 3:12 ... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good ***managers** of their children and their own households. (NASB)*

Titus 1:5-6 ... 5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. (NASB)