

# Qualifications of Deacons

By Mark Mayberry

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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)*

## **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.

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.**

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.**

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?

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 an 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 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:2 and 3:12, Paul sets forth the positive qualifications of an elder/deacon with great exactness.

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.).

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)...”

### **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.”

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).

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.