

ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE; &  
THE MEANING OF “THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE” IN ELDER AND DEACON QUALIFICATIONS  
An Elder Paper  
March 1, 2021

The purpose of this paper is to communicate to Crestview the elders’ understanding of the Bible’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage and the “husband of one wife” requirement related to elder and deacon qualifications. We receive questions about these issues on a regular basis and pray this paper presents clear, Biblical counsel to the church.

For further study we recommend: David Andrew Naselli, “What the New Testament Teaches about Divorce and Remarriage” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 24 (2019): 3-44. Available free at <https://dbts.edu/journal/>

ON MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

1. On Marriage:
  - a. Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. Married couples should grow in Christlike love and selfless service toward one another throughout their lives. (Gen. 2:15-25; Eph. 5:22-33)
  - b. Marriage is normal and should generally be pursued, yet the Bible affirms a life of content, celibate, singleness is God’s will for some. (1 Cor. 7)
  - c. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage are contrary to the created order and forbidden in Scripture. (Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11)
  - d. A believer is not to knowingly enter into marriage with an unbeliever. (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15)
  - e. Marriage is an earthly institution and is dissolved at the point of the death of either spouse. (Mk. 12:18-27; Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39; 1 Tim. 5:14)
  
2. On Divorce:
  - a. The Biblical principle of marriage is that husbands and wives are to remain married and should not divorce. (Mt. 19:3-6; Mk. 10:6-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-11; Heb. 13:4)
  - b. Couples experiencing marital difficulties are urged to seek the help of the church’s elders and other mature believers. (Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Thes. 5:14)
  - c. Divorce is permitted, but never required, by the Bible in specific situations. Reconciliation is often possible. Biblical exceptions are:
    - i. Sexual immorality (Dt. 24:1-4; Mt. 5:31-32, 19:3-12)
    - ii. Abandonment of the marriage covenant by desertion, physical abuse, material neglect, or refusing conjugal rights (Ex. 21:10-11; 1 Cor. 7:1-16)
      1. In cases when a professing Christian abandons the marriage covenant in one of these ways, the person may ultimately be regarded as an unbeliever through the process of church discipline. (Mt. 18:15-20, Jas. 5:19-20).
  - d. In his mercy God allows these exceptions to protect the innocent spouse and their children.
  - e. Divorce under any other circumstance is sin and is not to be pursued by a believer. This includes, but is not limited to: irreconcilable differences, falling out of love, financial difficulties, or differing paths.

3. On Remarriage:
  - a. In his mercy God allows remarriage in certain circumstances as a means of provision and protection. (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Tim. 5:14)
  - b. A believer whose spouse dies is free to remarry so long as the new spouse is a believer. (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Tim. 5:14).
  - c. Remarriage is permissible for a divorced believer, so long as the divorce was Biblically permissible. (1 Cor. 7:15).
  - d. If a divorce was Biblically illegitimate:
    - i. The two individuals are to remain single leaving open the possibility of reconciliation. Remarriage to a new spouse is not permitted so long as reconciliation is possible. (1 Cor. 7:10-11)
    - ii. If Spouse A dies, commits sexual immorality, or illegitimately enters a second marriage, then reconciliation of the previous marriage is no longer possible and Spouse B is permitted to remarry. (Deut. 24:1-4; Mk. 10:1-12; Lk. 16:18)
  - e. A believer should not marry a divorced person who is not Biblically eligible for remarriage.
  - f. If someone realizes they have divorced or remarried in a way that was Biblically illegitimate, what should they do?
    - i. Confess the sin to the Lord and those directly affected by it.
    - ii. Remain in their current marriage and live as a godly spouse (1 Cor. 7:17-24).

#### THE MEANING OF “HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE” IN ELDER AND DEACON QUALIFICATIONS

In 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6, one of the qualifications for an elder or deacon is that he be “the husband of one wife.” What does this qualification mean?

1. Meaning:
  - a. The phrase means “faithful to his wife.” It is a description of godly character meaning a man currently has a consistency and reputation for integrity and fidelity in his marriage. He is exclusively devoted to his wife. A man whose faithfulness to his wife is questionable is not qualified to be an elder or deacon.
  - b. The phrase cannot mean “a husband of one-and-only-one wife in a lifetime” because that would exclude what the Bible permits - remarriage after the death of a spouse.
  - c. The phrase cannot not mean “never divorced” because that would exclude what the Bible permits - divorce and remarriage are sometimes Biblically legitimate for believers.
  - d. A man may have illegitimately been divorced prior to his conversion, along with other sins. Yet, after years of growing discipleship, he is now a wonderful example of the fruit of conversion and sanctification who meets all elder/deacon qualifications. (1 Cor. 6:9-11, Tit. 3:3-7)
  - e. The church may not disqualify someone for doing what the Lord permits. While it is wrong to permit what God forbids, it is equally wrong to forbid what God permits. (Mk. 7:8-13)
2. What about single men?
  - a. The qualification does not require an elder or deacon to be married. Jesus and Paul were both single men, and singleness is commended in 1 Corinthians 7.
  - b. An unmarried or widowed man, who is otherwise qualified, may serve as an elder or deacon so long as he is a man of purity, celibacy, and above reproach in his behavior toward women.
3. What about men who have remarried after the death of a wife?

- a. The Bible allows, and in some circumstances, commends remarriage to a believer after the death of a spouse. Following such Biblical guidelines and being remarried should not disqualify a man from serving as an elder or deacon.
4. What about men who have remarried after divorce?
    - a. It depends upon the circumstances of the divorce. Some divorces and remarriages are not permitted by Scripture and are therefore sinful and ill-advised. In such cases a divorce or remarriage may disqualify a man. On the other hand, sometimes divorce and remarriage are permitted by Scripture and legitimate for believers. The timeline of a man's conversion and the track record of his life should be taken into consideration.

## CONCLUSION

The presence of divorce in a man's past should not automatically disqualify him from being nominated for elder or deacon service. During the established vetting process all nominees are verified to meet all Biblical qualifications, including being the "husband of one wife." Only qualified nominees will be recommended to the congregation for affirmation.

Please contact any elder with any further questions.