

1 Timothy 3:2 ; Titus 1:6

The Heresy & Truth

Of

The “Husband of one wife” Scripture

And

The Need for a Correct Interpretation

By

Pastor Tony King

Copyright July 2011

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

There is probably no phrase in the entire Bible more divisive, more problematic and more contentious than the words we are going to look at in this little book.

For centuries, the arguments surrounding the phrase in 1 Tim. 3:2 & Titus 1: 6 (“the husband of one wife”) lay mostly dormant, until the middle of the 1800’s, when divorce rates in Western society began to rise and the consequences became an issue with which the church had to contend.

The historical events of the times became a great weapon for Satan to use to bring discord among the Christian community and to divert the church’s priorities away from the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

As the divorce problem became a larger issue in society, the liberalization of theology was also taking place. Modern “Higher Criticism” escaped from Germany and spread like wildfire around the world, while the Great Awakenings which resulted in dynamic church growth, moved churches further to the “far right”, as they tried to retain their purity and withdraw in separation from a new theology that they considered would be the destruction of truth and righteousness.

The final result was that “liberal” theologians couldn’t move far enough left of center, away from traditionalism and conservatism, while “traditionalists” followed suit in moving “far right”, in order to do

everything in their power to protect what they believed was the sanctity of the Word and the practices of the church.

As time progressed, the separation between the two became wider and more distinct, and with it arose a thought process that literally forced everyone to belong to one camp or the other. If a believer questioned something in the Scriptures, he or she was immediately dubbed as “liberal”; if a “modernist” suggested error in the liberal theology, he or she was branded as being a “far right-wing fundamentalist.”

Soon, both camps were firmly set in their ways and in their ideological theologies.

But, Satan was not going to let a chaotic situation go to waste. In their attempt to win more support, the “liberals” began to preach and teach concepts that would normally never have been accepted by any right thinking Christian.

Out of this liberal thinking came the new “social gospel”, the “saved and lost” theology, the “freedom of women” movement and the plethora of new and “better” versions of the Bible.

At the same time, a similar “rebirth” was occurring among more fundamental Christians. In an understandable attempt to retain righteousness and purity within the church, traditional believers began to push as far away from the “left” as they could.

Out of this attitude came the King James Version “inspiration” movement; the “don’t dare question anything” belief among church leaders; the “if you don’t think and act just like me, then you couldn’t possibly be saved” philosophy. Their motives were honorable, but the problem was that “The Book” became more of a focus in people’s lives than “The Author” of the Book. Outward behavior became more accepted than inward change and a

new phariseeism was born that perhaps has caused more hurt to people and more damage to the cause of Christ than even the liberalism to which it was so opposed.

As the divorced rate continued to explode and become even rampant within the church, the question under consideration of whether or not divorced men may hold office in the church was ultimately relegated to an interpretation of a single phrase in the Scriptures, with no attention given to “the whole counsel of God”.

This little booklet is an attempt to provide those who are interested, with the opportunity to discover “the whole counsel of God” when it comes to understanding 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:6. To question Scripture while asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is not rabid liberalism. Rather it is the duty of every born-again Christian, and should not be feared by any student of the Word who genuinely seeks to know and understand God’s truth.

Chapter 2

The Most Common Interpretations

As we begin to examine our phrase “the husband of one wife”, our primary concern should not be: “What does this mean to the church today?” Rather we should be asking and investigating: “What did the Holy Spirit mean to say when He led Paul to write this phrase the way he did?” “What meaning did the original readers glean from Paul’s statement?” After all, the language he used was the “koine” Greek, the everyday language of the common folk, who surely must have understood exactly what the apostle was saying to them.

μιας γυναικος ανδρα,
mias, gunaikos, andra,
one, woman, man

We also need to be careful that our personal preferences do not cause us to stumble into any one particular interpretation.

Christ Himself warns us that we are not to “add to” nor “detract from” the Sacred texts. Scripture will *always* be able to interpret Scripture, if we are willing to allow it to do so. If the Bible clearly shows a truth that “goes against the grain of our personal beliefs”, then we, as mere mortals, must accept that truth without reservation or complaint. Having been raised in a very strong Roman Catholic family in Ireland, I can personally attest to the veracity of that statement.

Once I was introduced to the claims of Christ, I had to investigate and come to a realization that Mary (to whom I had had a particular devotion) was in fact no more a part of my salvation than I was.

So, if after my investigation of the “husband of one wife”, I discover that this particular text is more INCLUSIVE than I would wish it to be, I still must accept the truth as presented. If on the other hand, the text proves to be more EXCLUSIVE, then so be it.

The key to complete understanding of any Scripture is to come to it with *an open and teachable mind*. Outside of that, Satan will be happy to teach you lots of man-made rules and regulations, but as is his norm, those will be nothing but a warping of the truth God has given to us.

Remember, Scripture is given to us so that WE might change in obedience to God’s Word; Scripture is never given to us so that we might change IT to fall in line with our own ideology or pet interpretation on any subject.

Here then are several popular interpretations of the Timothy / Titus verse:

1. The candidate must not be a polygamist. He must have only one wife.

This interpretation is generally dismissed by many scholars who claim that polygamy was not common in the days of the early church. Yet, history records that this is not exactly true.

Polygamy did exist within the Roman and Greek cultures and in the Roman culture especially it was normative for a man to have at least one mistress if not more. When sinners were saved out of this popular culture, many of them continued their unsaved behavior patterns. This is why one of Paul’s ongoing themes in the Bible is the concept of change and growth in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

On top of this, the consequences of this polygamist (or licentious) lifestyle meant that men coming into the church would bring with them , not one, but sometimes three or four families, with all of the added difficulties this would bring to his Christian life.

What was he to do? Divorce all of the “wrong” wives and desert those children? It is one thing to repent and be saved, but the consequences of sin

often linger for a long time. What if the “other women” also became Christians? Doesn’t he have an even greater duty to them and to their offspring?

The truth is that sometimes new believers found themselves in this situation and Paul therefore admonishes the church that such should not be in a leadership role.

Now, while this interpretation is plausible, I do not believe it is the whole and final truth. We must investigate further to reveal the “whole counsel.”

2. The candidate must be married. Single men need not apply.

The idea for this interpretation comes from Acts 26:10, where Luke talks about the time Paul cast his vote against the new sect of Christians. Some scholars maintain this shows that Paul must have been a married man in order to be a voting member of the Sanhedrin (either his wife had died or divorced him).

Since it appears therefore that Paul himself was now not married, then it is very unlikely that he would restrict single men as to their ability to serve in leadership roles and in 1 Cor. 7, the apostle presents his teachings that unmarried people should be encouraged to greater opportunities for service.

However, proponents of this view emphasize that the proper role of church leadership is to be a good example to the church members and to the community without. This would include family life; being a good manager of the household and having children who believe and are steadfast. Thus, they say, a church leader could not fulfill this requirement if he is not married. I personally *prefer* to see a candidate who is married, but a single man if nominated, should be provided the opportunity to “prove” himself just as any other candidate should. However, due to the quirks of human nature, oftentimes, a single man (even if he is older) is not accepted in leadership by many people in the congregation.

3. The candidate must have remained single after the death of his wife.

This is a very shaky interpretation, since the Bible teaches that a man whose wife has died is free to remarry if he so chooses. In spite of what some modern “fundamentalists” preach, there is absolutely no evidence in Scripture that a man who remarries after the death of his wife is unfit for a leadership role. If Paul had wanted to make the statement that a widower should remain single if he wants to serve in leadership, then he would have directly said so in language similar to what he used in 1 Cor. 7.

4. The candidate must NEVER have been divorced.

This interpretation is by far the most common and most popular among conservative Christians. It has within it a tendency towards absolute belief --- no questions asked, no debate. If a man has been divorced, he is permanently disqualified from leadership and that’s the end of it.

However, many Christians are unaware of the fact that in the Greek there are specific words and phrases for “divorce”.

It is very significant that if Paul was meaning to say a man can never have been divorced and be in leadership, he did have specific terms he could have used to say this. In fact, he could have said that a man is to be “not divorced” just as easily as he says “not quarrelsome” and “not a drunkard”.

The question we must ask is: If Paul, who is not known for “beating around the bush” or “mincing his words”, had wanted to teach that a candidate must not be ever divorced, then why did he choose to use such an ambiguous term as “the husband of one wife” when a more simple and more direct Greek phrase was available to him?

Add to this that none of the remaining qualifications are ambiguous in any way and we must ask ourselves why the Holy Spirit chose this specific phrase.

We will discuss this later in greater detail.

5. The candidate can have been divorced, but only under certain provisions.

(i) He is the innocent party.

(ii) The divorce happened before he came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

(iii) Even if the innocent party, if the divorced occurred after his salvation, he must spend years “proving” himself before he can be considered.

Once again, this interpretation requires us to delve more deeply into the total concepts of what Paul is actually saying. This will be dealt with later.

Chapter 3

When does “is” means “is and when does “is” not mean “is”?

And

By whose authority does the church change the rules in the middle of the game?

Greek is a very specific language! Its verb forms and additional grammatical requirements make it a language that leaves little to the imagination as to what an author is meaning in his writings.

In 1 Tim. 3: 1, the emphasis of the verbs is on the *Present Tense*. In other words, we could legitimately translate verse 1 as: “This is a true saying. If a man is presently desiring the office of a bishop, he is desiring a good work.”

Verse 2: “A bishop then must be being blameless, (be being) the husband of one wife, (be being) vigilant etc.....”

In other words there is a definite suggestion in the Greek that the emphasis on the qualifications for a pastor or deacon is on the “here and now” or at least “recent time”, rather than the distant past.

But now we come to one of the most controversial aspects of this debate and the question we must all answer is: Why do we take the phrase. “the husband of one wife”, place such stringent demands upon it for any candidate, and yet negate the same stringency on all the other qualifications?

This is key to a Godly understanding of what Paul is saying.

If we set a certain standard for one particular phrase, is it not logical to demand that we maintain the same standard for all other phrases?

Shall we then go back into a man’s life and search out whether or not he has ever been drunk?

I am not a drinker and never have been. I have tasted several different types of alcohol, but I have never been known as someone who “has a drink.”

Yet I have to admit to having been drunk one time. Here are the circumstances:

Many years ago, while living in Australia, I contracted an illness known as pleurisy. This is an infection of the lungs and from bitter memory it is not only debilitating but also unbelievably painful in the lungs and across the shoulders.

After some time I became bedridden, unable to walk or sit or stand, even for short periods of time. The medications from the doctors didn't seem to be doing much good, so after about nine days, several of the ladies from my church came to visit. The discussion quickly went to old “home-style” remedies and one of them went to the local off-license bar and bought a mid-sized bottle of whiskey.

Their passing comment on leaving was something along the lines of: “Remember, boiling water, two sugar and the whiskey.”

This was a rather unfortunate message to leave with my wife who had never had any contact with alcohol at all and in making up the “hot toddy” as it was called, instead of adding just a capful of the alcohol, she proceeded to add the whole bottle of whiskey, in a large mug, with boiling water to “top it up” and the two sugars.

I do remember it tasted vile, but being a sick, obedient invalid, I finally managed to drink it all down.

They tell me I slept for over 18 hours and when I awoke the pain in my lungs and shoulders was gone. I actually felt good, but when I tried to stand up ----- that's when the “chicken came home to roost.”

My head was spinning; the back of my eyes burned unmercifully and the slightest noise was like the proverbial herd of elephants trumpeting through my brain.

Apparently, I was feeling the effects of a hangover and although it made me feel miserable, it also made me question: “why would any sane person do this to themselves willingly?”

Now, to the purpose of my story:

“*Not given to wine* (alcohol)” (1 Tim. 3:3).

If in investigating a candidate we demand the right to go back through his whole life in regards to his marriage state(s), then we must also make the same requirements for the “not given to wine” phrase.

“Well pastor”, you might say, “your case of being drunk was a one time only and it happened a long time ago and occurred under difficult circumstances.”

Well friends, perhaps so did the candidate’s divorce. **If we apply one set of rules to the “husband of one wife” phrase, then in all honesty and theological integrity, we must do likewise for all other qualifications.**

If we choose to be stricter on the “husband of one wife” phrase, and diminish the other requirements, then we cannot be considered anything but hypocrites and Pharisees.

Some may think these are harsh words, but am I wrong in applying them to this situation? I do not believe so. As a matter of fact, my pastoral experience has been that when it comes to the selection of a pastoral or deacon candidate, many churches will concern themselves almost solely with the “husband of one wife” phrase while almost totally ignoring the other requirement with the same, stringent thoroughness.

Read any church’s constitution and bye laws and I can almost guarantee you that when it comes to decreeing the qualifications of a pastor or deacon, the “husband of one wife” will be almost certainly front and center, while only a minimal mention will be made of the other verses, if at all.

In the Biblical words of James 3:

⁹Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

*¹⁰Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. **My brethren, these things ought not so to be.***

¹¹Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?"

How can we as leaders of a church claim to be doing God's will, when we use our own ideologies and preferences to make scripture teach what we want it to teach?

Then in addition to the need for being aware of our own prejudices and preconceived beliefs, we immediately come to another problem and that is the cultural biases of different generations and countries.

My wife and I grew up in conservative Ireland in the 50's and 60's. In our culture, "dating" was not really begun by young people until they had entered university or even later. It was in fact a rarity for High Schoolers to be dating even casually.

On the other hand, in America, "dating" even in Junior High, was quite common, and it was not unusual for a young couple in High School and early College to be strongly involved in an on-going emotional relationship.

Many times, such relationships went far beyond the realm of "hand-holding" and for the sake of decency, we will leave the subject there. Suffice to say, that 20 years later, I do not believe it would be an exaggeration to say that there are pastors who on the surface meet the "husband of one wife" qualification, yet if we were to investigate their past experiences more deeply, we would find otherwise.

"But", you might claim, "they never married in that earlier relationship, so that doesn't count".

My reply to that is simply another question.

When and how does a Biblical marriage take place? When the priest or the rabbi asks the couple to say “I do”? When the young man takes his bride back to the room he has built at his father’s home? And should that be the format for all “Christian” marriages?

I recently watched an interesting program on television in which the narrator described marriage ceremonies around the world. In one such case, the bride and groom stood facing each other with a broomstick laying at their feet. At a given signal, the bride and groom stepped across the broomstick to the opposite side and at that moment, in that culture, they were “married”.

So once again the question needs to be asked: What makes a Biblical marriage?

The answer is simple. **A marriage takes place when a man and a woman “come together” as one.** That is why it is called the “marriage act.” Standing in front of the priest or preacher or rabbi or iman or even a county court judge, does not make a marriage --- that just makes it legal.

John and Susie meet, fall in love and “get married”, but the marriage in truth either already has taken place or will take place when John and Susie “come together” as man and wife.

This takes us back to our quandary. Here is a candidate. He has been married to the same woman for 17 years. He has never been through a marriage ceremony other than with this current wife. In the eyes of the (Christian) society he has not been divorced. Yet, when he was much younger, he met a young lady at college and to cut costs and because they became emotionally attached, they “moved in” together. Again, no marriage ceremony took place. Sadly, within a year or so, they both decided to go their separate ways and they haven’t seen or heard from each other since.

Our make- believe candidate has only been “married” once according to law and has never been divorced ----- or has he? If marriage is solidified in the

eyes of God (as I believe it is) when a man and a woman come together as one, and if we believe that a divorced man cannot be in leadership in the church, then there are an awful lot of pastors and deacons throughout America who should resign forthwith!

What has been the point of all of this discourse so far?

Simply this --- that it is not good Biblical hermeneutics to simply grasp a phrase or even a verse and build a doctrine upon it WITHOUT completing a very thorough investigation into the Who, What, Why, Where, When and How of the subject.

In addition, many who disagree with the contents of this book will try to settle the debate simply by stating: “It’s there, in the Bible, in black and white, that’s good enough for me”.

OK. Let’s go with that method of interpretation for a moment.

It is also “in the Bible, in black and white” where Paul says:

“I would that you all spake with tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5).

Therefore, according to our interpretative methodology, this means that we Baptists should stop being so anti-Charismatic and anti-the sign gifts but rather we should welcome them into our midst. And if that is not enough for you, listen to this:

“Wherefore brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39).

There it is! In the Bible! In black and white! That just seems to cement the whole thing in place. We Baptists ought to be speaking in tongues and that’s the end of it. Or is it?

If you are a sound, traditional, conservative Baptist, you know instinctively that everything I have just said is wrong!

How do we know that? Simply because when we conclude a full and detailed investigation of the gift of tongues and the other “sign gifts”, we

conclude that they were temporary for that time and that they are no longer necessary or suitable for the modern church's needs.

Notice therefore, "it's in the Bible; it's there in black and white" is not good hermeneutics. Hence, we cannot use this method of interpretation on this one phrase no matter how comfortably it makes the passage fit our personal ideologies.

Therefore to summarize:

1. If we want to discover the full meaning of any Biblical principle or doctrine, we must first be willing to lay aside all of our preconceived notions and humbly seek the Lord's guidance through the Holy Spirit into all truth.
2. One rule for one sentence and a different rule for another sentence is not good hermeneutics. We either set the rules of interpretation at the beginning and follow through with those rules right to end, (no matter how much our findings agree or disagree with our personal preferences), or we fall into the trap of being deceived by Satan.
3. "It's in the KJV and that's good enough for me", is not good scholarship. I am a strong KJV pastor, but that sort of reaction is not only childish, but leaves the question being asked open to even more deception by Satan and the powers of darkness.
4. We must always be careful when interpreting scripture, NOT to place our western mentality and culture on to word and phrase meanings. Paul writes to us in 2 Timothy:

2 Tim.3:3

"Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good..."

Some years ago, in a church of which I was pastor, I had a gentleman as a member who firmly was convinced that this meant that at the end times,

bowel cancer would be rampant because Paul says men will be “incontinent”.

Now we may well smile at this, but his unwillingness to accept better scholarship is no more unacceptable and childish than is the resistance given by many when it comes to the qualifications for church leadership.

5. The whole passage must be treated with the same rules and regulations without undue harshness being placed on just one.

In verse one we need to recognize that word “must”, which again in the Greek is a specific word almost of command.

This means that all the qualifications for leadership hold the same force equally, and if “X” amount of force is going to be applied to one of the requirements, then “X” amount of force must be applied to all the requirements.

We all must be honest and agree that in too many churches, constitutions and bye laws, the “husband of one wife” is emphasized to a harsher standard than everything else. I have known pastors and deacons who were clearly qualified when it came to the “husband” test, but sadly the bratiness of their children left a lot of questions to be answered. I know pastors who move from churches every 2 to 3 years, simply for a bigger salary and more prestigious congregation, but no-one ever questions their “greed” qualification.

Show me any pastor or deacon in America and allow me to use the same stringent rules on his reputation from the past as is regularly used on the “husband” phrase and I guarantee that not one will be left standing.

One of the most difficult tasks for any Christian, is to approach the Scriptures with a humbleness of mind and heart and be willing to change if that is what is needed or, to be prepared to stand even stronger if right is proven to be right.

So then, what is the solution to our problem? Are we to lower the standards and be less strict about who can be a pastor or deacon?

The answer of course is a resounding “NO”!

Chapter 4

What then does it all mean?

One thing in the ministry I hate doing while I am preaching or teaching is to say: “In the original Greek.....”.

Sometimes it can sound so pompous and arrogant, and preachers ought to avoid it as much as they can.

Yet, there are certain cases, and our investigation is one of them, when we must say that in order to understand Paul’s meaning and intention, we really do have to go back to the original language and examine it thoroughly.

Here is our phrase from 1 Timothy and Titus:

μιας γυναικος ανδρα,
mias, gunaikos, andra,
one, woman, man

I would remind us that in the Greek there is no word for “husband” or “wife”.

The “andra” here comes from the word “aner” meaning a male person.

The “gunaikos” is literally “woman” and when the two are used together as they are here, the understood meaning is in the context of a marriage. However, the meaning that would have jumped out at Paul’s readers is not so much “husband of one wife” but rather, “ a one woman sort of man”.

However, there is an even more important lesson to be drawn from the Greek that most Christians and many scholars fail to recognize or are unaware of. You may remember that earlier I stated that Greek is a very specific language and in this phrase, the form of the original language clarifies for us what Paul is actually talking about. If we read this passage in the original, we will see that there is no “definite” article applied to the nouns. The article “the” is missing . This is not just a little error. In fact it is crucial to our understanding of the whole message the Holy Spirit is giving us.

When the article is missing as it is here, the writer is talking about character or quality. In spite of what popular interpretation is, the phrase “the husband of one wife” is not talking about the marriage of the couple nor the length of time of marriage nor even the question of divorce or remarriage. The clear message of the Greek is that Paul is talking about the faithfulness quality of the character and nature of the man in relation to his wife.

I have previously mentioned the importance of the verb in Greek and that our current verses are written in the Present Tense. That is not by accident. There are sufficient other tenses that Paul could have used if he had wanted to give the message that we are to investigate a man’s life back to his birth.

Therefore we can state without doubt or question that in a culture and society where men were frequently involved in sexual “wandering”, Paul makes it clear that the pastor and / or deacon is to be a “one woman sort of man” NOW , rather than demanding an investigation of one incident in the candidate’s life.

Today, we could easily equate Paul’s admonitions to mean that the candidate in question is not to be a “dirty old man”.

In all the years I have been involved in ministry, I have constantly upheld what I believe to be a truth that God has given women a type of sixth sense about men, especially in the area of sexuality.

In the past I have been shocked and horrified by women coming to my wife and sharing with her that a certain man in the church “gives me the creeps” or “makes me want to go and get dressed”. THAT is exactly the type of thing Paul is talking about in our text! **If a man is to be a leader in the church, he is to have such a reputation that all women feel safe in his company because it is abundantly clear to everyone that he IS a “one woman sort of man”.**

Without Godly leadership, a church cannot hope to be Godly. It is Godly leadership that steers the ship in the right direction; that guides it safely through the storms; that encourages the whole crew to be involved so that The Captain will be honored and glorified.

Once we come to grips with this, we can begin to see that the qualifications of Timothy and Titus were given more as guidelines to examine an overall picture, rather than unbending standards for each requirement.

It could be asked: Can a man who once was a murderer, rapist and armed bank robber ever be a leader in a church? The answer of course is “yes”, after he had proven the veracity of his salvation by a change of lifestyle and after years of proving his growth in Christ.

Yet, in the same church, a man who has faithfully served the Lord for years and today has a reputation for Godliness, will be disbarred from leadership because of *his* sin from twenty or thirty years ago. There is nothing of grace in that scenario.

I do believe that within the church’s framework of selecting leadership we MUST have high and strict standards, even if some of those may seem at times to be unfair.

So if our text clearly demonstrates that divorce permanently disbars a man from office, then so be it and every church should adhere to that principle. But, I believe I have shown enough “reasonable doubt” as to the veracity of this interpretation.

Yes, by all means let us err on the side of righteousness, but I believe that in the grace of Christ, if a man is otherwise fully qualified in all other aspects, we would do well to examine our thinking when it comes to the “husband of one wife”.

The one thing that disturbs me greatly is that too often a man is disqualified by a church solely on the basis of this one requirement and yet, no such stringent investigation is carried out re. a past life of murder, promiscuity, rape, homosexuality, abortion, wife and child abuse, greed, gossip and gluttony.

Think of it ! A man lives the homosexual lifestyle (or a life of murder, or rape, or pedophilia) when he is young. He then is saved through the blood of Christ, grows in His grace and truth and one day is accepted into the leadership ranks of his church. Is this possible? Yes, of course it is.

Yet, a man, who thought he was “in love” gets married, realizes within a short space of time what a silly mistake he has made, gets a divorce, is saved through the same blood of Christ, grows in the same grace and truth, but is permanently banned from any leadership role?

Finally, Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 5:17, that when a person comes to Christ, he is in fact a “*new creature*” and that the “*old things are passed away*”. Again in Phil.3:13, he challenges us with “forgetting those things that are behind..... “*I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”

How can we, as a church, claim to be encouraging our people to follow and obey these scriptures, when we are prepared to drag up the “dirt” of a man’s life in front of his wife and children and friends, based solely on our interpretation of one single phrase in the whole Bible?

If a man is truly character qualified except for the “one wife” issue and we disbar him permanently, then we ought to follow through with the strength of our convictions and re-examine ALL

of our pastors and deacons and apply the same stringent tests to ALL aspects of their lives both recent and in the distant past.

If a church is willing to do that, then I will gladly and vehemently defend their right to claim their interpretation of “one wife”.

However, if excuses start being made and “umming” and “aahing” begins, and the church refuses to re-examine all aspects of the lives of its leadership, while still rigidly adhering to the “one wife” phrase, *then that leadership has placed itself back under the condemnation of being hypocrites and manipulators of the Word.*

If our selected phrase truly means “one who has never been divorced”, then the other phrases must mean : “one who has never been violent or a brawler” ; “one who has never been a lover of money”; “ one who has never been reproached in his life”.

However, after all that we have discussed, let it never be assumed that divorce is inconsequential. All of the Bible is replete with teaching that divorce is sin; that Christians especially should avoid it with all strength that they can find in Christ.

If a man is nominated for leadership and a divorce is in his recent past, the congregation would do well to look at that as a “red flag” warning, since clearly he is having a problem with the “control of the family” issue as well. Even if the divorce is from long past, the candidate would do well to explain its circumstances so that no-one can later accuse him of “hiding his past”.

But let us all remember that no person can fulfill the qualifications of Timothy and Titus 100% at 100% of the time.

I believe the real truth of Paul’s teaching is this:

All of these qualifications and requirements are to be examined as character attributes that the candidate should possess albeit with some imperfections.

No man can be “required” to be just, fair, temperate, prudent, hospitable, honorable, apt to teach, true in his word, 100% of the time with 100%

perfectionism.. **Indeed, none of the qualifications for pastors and deacons can be seen in any man in perfect form.**

It is the overall, recognizable character of the man we should be looking at.

Nit-picking on one aspect of his life, while ignoring or diminishing other aspects, can only be described as the worst of scholarship if not even a deliberate attempt to make the Bible teach our own personal, favorite ideology.

Let us not make any mistake. The evil of immorality and divorce must be expounded and taught in the church with the same vehemence that is found in the Scripture. But let us never forget that all sin can be forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ and that any sinner can be saved and then changed by His power through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

The qualifications for pastor and deacon clearly do not require the life-long absence of these specific sins in a candidate's life.

Rather they demonstrate how a fallen man can be redeemed and “re-grown” to such an extent that the Holy Spirit is willing to place in his care the spiritual lives of church members and the reputation of the church throughout its local community.

The issue at stake here is not a man's current or previous marital status.

It is something vastly more important than that.

It is his character of godliness and his witness for Christ, lived out in the privacy of his home with his wife and family and then within his church and throughout his neighborhood.

For any church to “cast aside” a good and godly man, based solely on a pet theory constructed on one five letter phrase, is questionable at best, and may in fact be an unwitting attempt to thwart the grace of God in a man's life and could even possible align that church with the work of Satan, who hates to see Godliness in leadership and who would rather raise up the

“weak things” of this world to prevent the church from being everything God has created it to be.

May the Lord bless all of us as we consider this very important aspect of our church life and may each of us at least be challenged to examine our own ideologies and ensure that what we are practicing and believing stands firmly on God.the truth of the Word of God.

Pastor Tony King

Copyright July 2011