

After a thorough discussion of the subject under consideration, the Committee adopted the following statement and recommendations for presentation to the Sixth General Assembly:

I. The Interpretation of Paul's qualification for church officers, "the husband of one wife," I Timothy 3:2 and 12; Titus 1:6.

Paul's qualification that an elder or deacon must be "the husband of one wife" has been interpreted mainly in four ways.

1. Some have held that any twice-married man is thereby disqualified for church office, and some devout scholars have translated Paul's words to read, "married only once." Nowhere in the Bible, however, is the remarriage of a widow or widower as such treated as a reflection upon that person's moral character. Consequently, this interpretation does not seem valid.
2. A second interpretation is that an elder must not be a polygamist or that he must not have more than one living wife or more than one woman living who has been his wife. Although scholars have differed in their judgment of the extent to which polygamy posed a problem for the church in Paul's day, the interpretation of Paul's words as excluding a polygamist from church office appears to be a valid one.
3. Some interpret Paul's qualification as directed against the divorce evil, which seems to have been rather common, and have understood Paul's words as disqualifying for church office a man who had divorced and remarried, or at least a man who had divorced on other than Scriptural grounds and remarried.
4. Still another interpretation is that a man called to office in the church must be a man of unquestioned moral integrity, a man who is free from any taint of sexual promiscuity or laxity, and who is strictly faithful to his one wife.

Each of the latter three of these views has certain merit as an interpretation of Paul's words, "the husband of one wife," both in the light of the immediate context (with its emphasis on the officer's being above reproach and his managing his own family well) and in the larger context of the whole Scripture. Paul's concern seems to involve this much at the very least, that the man chosen to be a church officer (whether elder or deacon) must be a man whose marital and family relationships are above reproach, and whose personal example gives no encouragement to lax morality.

II. Recommendations: The Committee accordingly recommends:

1. That the General Assembly reaffirm its commitment to the Biblical position as summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXIV, regarding the integrity of marriage according to the Divine ideal as being for life.
2. That the General Assembly affirm that the integrity of marriage is founded upon God's Word, which declares that marriage is God's institution and should be God-centered, not man-centered. Both husband and wife are the Lord's servants and submit one to the other in terms of the Lord's purposes. They are, together, the Lord's creatures, called to serve Him, with one, the husband, exercising loving headship in that calling.
3. That the General Assembly declare that the Biblical ideal for church office is exemplary conduct to the highest degree possible with regard to all of the qualifications set forth by the Apostle Paul in I Timothy and Titus 1.
4. That the General Assembly affirm that the Bible teaches that divorce is permissible in the case of sexual immorality (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:9) or willful desertion of a believer by an unbeliever (I Corinthians 7:15). The innocent party is therefore free to remarry, since he is no longer "under bondage," once properly divorced. (See *Westminster Confession Of Faith*, XXIV-5). Anyone who is divorced in accord with Biblical principles, whether remaining single or having remarried, may serve as a church officer.
5. That the General Assembly urge church courts to exercise special care in the cases of divorced/remarried persons who are considered for ordination, that where there has been divorce and remarriage on other than Scriptural grounds, guilt must be acknowledged and repentance for sin expressed.
6. That the General Assembly remind the church that in order to be considered for church office the parties concerned in such cases must have been rehabilitated sufficiently in the confidence and respect of other Christians as to be able to fulfill in an exemplary way the requirements of church office with regard to marital and family relationships. The General Assembly reminds the church and its courts that even when such care is exercised as is urged in this and the foregoing recommendation, there may be circumstances in which it would be inadvisable, even though technically permissible, for divorced/remarried persons to serve as church officers.
7. That the General Assembly exhort sessions and presbyteries to follow Scriptural guidelines carefully in dealing with present or prospective church officers who have been divorced.
8. That the General Assembly answer Overture 12 from the Presbytery of North Georgia to the Fifth General Assembly, with regard to divorce and remarriage, by reference to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXIV.

Teaching Elder James Campbell and Ruling Elder John Thompson are submitting a minority report so that the General Assembly will have opportunity to discuss a concept other than that espoused by the Committee as a whole.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruling Elders

Kenneth Ryskamp
Steve Fox
Henry Dekker
John Thompson
Stokes Robertson

Teaching Elders

William J. Stanway
Charles Young
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Richard Knodel
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Advisory Members

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Charles H. Dunahoo

**MINORITY REPORT
AD-INTERIM THEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE ON DIVORCE**

Change I, 4 of the Committee's statement to read as follows:

Each of the latter three of these views has certain merit as an interpretation of Paul's words, "the husband of one wife," however, Paul, in the context of I Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-9, is giving clear guidelines for the selection of officers in the Church, the household of God. In order to protect the church which is the pillar and support of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), Paul states most clearly that men who exercise leadership must have proven their ability to manage their own households (I Timothy 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6) before they can care for God's household (I Timothy 3:15). Thus, one who has difficulty managing a small family, which ends in divorce on other than Biblical grounds, has demonstrated a character weakness and character taint which is a warning to the Church that he is one unfit to manage the larger family, the Church of the Living God. Such a man may certainly know God's forgiveness upon repentance and have a secure place in the Church but he has forfeited his opportunity to serve as an officer because he would then be the husband of more than one wife.

In order to protect the Church, Paul directs (I Timothy 3:10) that potential leadership be tested by the Church and thus prove their worthiness to hold the offices of the Church. One who is divorced on other than Biblical grounds, would cast doubt on his ability to provide leadership within the Church in family counseling situations.

Paul is also concerned that the leadership of the Church be above reproach (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) and not open to a charge of a bad reputation by those outside the Church (I Timothy 3:7). Any church leader who had experienced mishandling of his own family and divorce on other than Biblical grounds, would open the Church to ridicule and contempt by those outside.

Change the Committee's recommendation to read as follows:

II. Recommendations:

- A. That the recommendations of the Ad-Interim Theological Committee, numbers 1 through 4 be adopted as stated;
- B. That recommendations 5 and 6 be deleted;
- C. That recommendation 7 be amended to read as follows:
 5. That the General Assembly exhort sessions and presbyteries to follow scriptural guidelines carefully in dealing with present or prospective church officers who have been divorced. That no man be considered for church office who has been divorced on other than Biblical grounds in order that the church and its leadership may be above reproach by both those outside and inside the Church.
- D. That recommendation 8 be numbered 6.

Respectfully submitted
Reverend Jim Campbell
Mr. John G. Thompson

Committee report adopted. § 7-42; pp. 106-110.