

INTRODUCTION.

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING A FEW WEEKS AGO, ~ THE QUESTION AROSE AS TO THE qualifications of deacons as spelled out in 1 Tim. 3:8-12, ~ i.e., ~ who is qualified to serve?

- ▶▶ Specifically, ~ the phrase translated in many versions as "husband of one wife."
- ▶▶ The related issue is the qualifications of elders, ~ since this identical phrase is used in the two passages that spell out who can serve as elders.
- ▶▶ After prayer, ~ deliberation, ~ a few emails, ~ phone calls, ~ and a final meeting, ~ we, ~ the elders, ~ reached a consensus on the best way to interpret this phrase.
- ▶▶ We decided that I would take you through a brief study on this.
- ▶▶ And hopefully, ~ as we go through this today, ~ you will see the reasoning and the logic of our choice as to which interpretation is the best one.
- ▷▷ Now may seem a bit boring, ~ but it's extremely important to have clarity, ~ and for you to understand our reasoning behind the decision.

THE GREEK PHRASE IN ALL THREE PASSAGES IS IDENTICAL.

IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE GREEK TERMS PAUL USES.

- ▶▶ 1st, ~ the word "γυναικὸς" can mean "woman" or "wife." ~ 2nd, ~ the word "ἄνθρωπος" can mean "man" or "husband."
- ▶▶ It could be translated literally this way, ~ "a one-woman man."
- ▶▶ The Greek is ambiguous, ~ which means open to interpretation and gives a range of possibilities.
- ▷▷ And this means that we must exercise humility and grace in whatever interpretation we adopt.
- ↪↪ Even though one might be convinced they hold the right one, ~ they might be wrong. ~ I'm pretty sure that it has probably happened before.

A RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES. ~ SO THE QUESTION THEN BECOMES, ~ "WHAT DO WE do?" ~ Or, ~ "how do we proceed?" ↯↯ 1/6

▶▶ Well, ~ when it comes to interpreting the Bible, ~ context is crucial, ~ even more so when the original language is ambiguous or rare.

▷▷ In fact, ~ I would go so far as to say that the most important principle of biblical interpretation is that context determines meaning.

↪↪ When we ignore the context, ~ we can twist the Scriptures and "prove" almost anything.

▷▷ Circles of context

▷▷ But the highest priority should be given to the immediate context when determining the meaning of the word, ~ phrase, ~ or sentence in question.

▶▶ Ok, ~ let's come back to the phrase in question, ~ "a one-woman man." ~ As noted, ~ range of possibilities, ~ 4 of them.

▶▶ And here's how we proceed.

▷▷ We have to evaluate each interpretation of the phrase through the grid of the immediate context, ~ or the paragraphs, ~ in which this phrase occurs.

▶▶ Here are two guiding questions for evaluating an interpretation.

▷▷ 1st, ~ does it fit the context? ~ IOW, ~ is this what Paul is talking about in Q?

▷▷ 2nd, ~ is interpretation reading a meaning into the text or is it derived from the text?

↪↪ IOW, ~ Start w/ conclusion & look for proof? ~ Or conc. drawn from reading?

OK, ~ WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS AND DEACONS?

▶▶ In each passage, ~ the context, ~ 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, for elders, ~ 1 Tim. 3:8-12 for deacons, ~ the context, ~ I would suggest, ~ focuses on a man's character.

▶▶ LEB, ~ "On account of this, I left you behind in Crete, in order that what remains may be set in order and you may appoint elders in every town, as I ordered you. If anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of dissipation or rebellious [iow, ~ good manager]. For it is necessary for the overseer to be blameless as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, prudent, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast to the faithful message according to the teaching, in order that he may be able both to exhort with sound instruction and to reprove those who speak against it. ↵↵ 2/6

▶▶ The qualifications for elders and deacons refer to character and not to status, ~ whether, ~ e.g., ~ marital or family.

▶▶ So any interpretation that fits this immediate context of the passage and is a conclusion drawn from reading the text, ~ is the better interpretation and the one to adopt.

NOW LETS' LOOK AT AND EVALUATE FOUR COMMON INTERPRETATIONS OF THE phrase "a one-woman man."

1st, ~ THE QUALIFICATION "A ONE-WOMAN MAN" PROHIBITS POLYGAMISTS FROM holding this office.

▶▶ Not likely to have been Paul's intention. ~~ Monogamy was by far the norm of that day.

▷▷ Polygamy was generally regarded as abhorrent and did not need to be mentioned in such a list. ~~ And it is never mentioned elsewhere as a problem in the early church.

▶▶ But most importantly, ~ getting back to our grid of the immediate context, ~~ ¶¶

▷▷ this interpretation does not seem to fit what Paul's talking about when it comes to qualifications, ~ nor does it seem to be a conclusion that comes from reading the text.

↪↪ Because it's speaking of marital status and not a characteristic of the man.

▶▶ Now, ~ as a side note, ~ the teaching of the Bible is clear that marriage it to be between one man and one woman. ~~ Polygamy is ruled out as an option for Christian marriage.

▷▷ So of course common sense tells us that polygamists would be automatically excluded.

▶▶ But, ~ again, ~ Paul's talking about required characteristics and not marital status.

2nd COMMON INTERP. ~~ THE QUALIFICATION "A ONE-WOMAN MAN" EXCLUDES those who have remarried after the death of a spouse. ~~ This is an equally unlikely suggestion.

▶▶ Remaining single, ~ particularly in the case of widows, ~ was often commended.

▷▷ But Paul seems to have allowed and even to have encouraged the remarriage of the surviving partner.

↪↪ 1 Cor. 7:39-40, ~ NIV ~ "39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. 40 In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God." ~~ **And 1 Tim. 5:14** . . . ~~ ***Widowers.*** ¶¶ 3/6

▶▶Indeed, ~ it would be strange for the apostle of liberty, ~ who considers widows and widowers free to marry as long as the person is a believer, ~ ¶¶

▷▷and who used this principle of freedom to illustrate his teaching on the law in [Rom. 7](#), ~ to deny this freedom to a potential church officer whose spouse has died.

▶▶Most importantly, ~ this interpretation too does not seem to fit what Paul's talking about when it comes to qualifications, ~ ¶¶

▷▷nor does it seem to be a conclusion that comes from reading the text.

▷▷Because it's speaking of marital status and not a quality of the man.

↳↳Also doesn't seem to fit the wider context of what Paul says elsewhere.

THE 3rd COMMON INTERP. ~~ THE QUALIFICATION "A ONE-WOMAN MAN" specifically rules out those who have remarried after divorce.

▶▶But even granting a fairly strong stand in the New Testament on the issue of divorce, ~ exceptions to the rule prohibiting remarriage were made in the case of adultery, ~ ¶¶

▷▷and perhaps in the case of desertion by the unbelieving wife. ([Matt.:](#) [1 Cor.](#))

▷▷The question then, ~ for us to ponder, ~ becomes, ~ if remarriage is allowed under these certain circumstances, ~ ¶¶

↳↳why should a man who fits under such a circumstance, ~ and fits all other qualifications, ~ not be allowed to serve as an elder or a deacon?

▶▶Most importantly, ~ however, ~ this interpretation also does not seem to fit what Paul's talking about when it comes to qualifications, ~ ¶¶

▷▷nor does it seem to be a conclusion that comes from reading the text. ~~ Because it's speaking of marital status and not a characteristic of the man.

▶▶Furthermore, ~ the Bible actually never says a divorced person cannot be an elder or a deacon. ~~ This is an important distinction.

▷▷A person's interpretation of this difficult phrase, ~ "[a one-woman man](#)," ~ may yield this conclusion, ~ but the Bible clearly does not say the word "divorced."

↳↳We need to be honest with this fact. ¶¶ 4/6

AND THE 4th COMMON INTERP. ~ THE QUALIFICATION "A ONE-WOMAN MAN" IS A requirement for faithfulness in marriage.

▶▶ And this is the interpretation that we, ~ the elders, ~ feel is the best of the four, ~ and therefore the one we will follow here at NHCC. ~ You'll see why as I explain.

▶▶ Given the context of the three passages, ~ this interpretation seems to be the most plausible.

▷▷ It fits what Paul is talking about when it comes to qualifications, ~ and does seem to be a conclusion that comes from reading the text.

▶▶ Since the focus in all three passages is on required characteristics of the candidate for leadership, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ it is far more likely that Paul would stress fidelity in marriage than anything else when he says the elder/deacon must be "a one-woman man."

↪↪ So the point of the phrase is probably not how often one can be married, ~ but rather how a man conducts himself in his marriage.

▶▶ In addition to this interpretation best fitting the immediate context, ~ it also fits the wider context of the NT. ~ Acts 6:1-6

▶▶ Furthermore, ~ this interpretation fits the wider biblical context. ~ It seems to go along with the command in Ex. 20:14, ~ "You shall not commit adultery."

▶▶ Also, ~ perhaps we should mention here that marital infidelity was common in Greco-Roman culture, ~ so it would not be surprising that this is what Paul was addressing.

▶▶ Now, ~ by way of application, ~ we can revisit the subjects of polygamy and divorce.

▷▷ The command to be faithful to one's wife would include a prohibition against polygamy.

▷▷ And concerning divorce, ~ we can say this.

↪↪ If a believer divorces his wife for anything other than sexual immorality on her part, ~ he is obviously not being faithful to his wife, ~ ¶¶

→→ and therefore would be disqualified from being an elder or a deacon.

▶▶ And we should note that since Paul is talking about faithfulness in marriage, ~ this allows widowers and divorced men to serve as elders and deacons. ¶¶ 5/6

CONCLUSION.

AGAIN, ~ FAITHFULNESS IN MARRIAGE IS THE INTERPRETATION THAT WE, ~ THE elders, ~ feel is the best of the four.

▶▶ Therefore, ~ this the one we will follow here at NHCC.

▷▷ And this means that at the meeting following our fellowship lunch, ~ we will simply be nominating our brother to serve as a deacon. ~~ Then we will have three deacons.

▶▶ Now having said all of this today, ~ in closing we must stress that one must exercise humility and grace in whatever interpretation they adopt.

▷▷ Even though one might be convinced they hold the right one, ~ they might be wrong.

↪↪ I'm pretty sure that it has happened before.

LET'S PRAY 6/6