

A Valuable Deacon Character Study with Special Emphasis on Marriage and Divorce

Divorce is such a painful word as it should be interpreted that way. Yet, it is word that should not bring out the worst in people no matter whether they are involved in it personally, witness it, and or hear about it. As Scripture states, we too should hate divorce like God hates divorce. Yet, that doesn't mean that we hate the people have had a divorce or are considering it. In this following paper, the desire is to address the important and vital role of the office of Deacon in relation to whether a Deacon can be divorced to be a servant within the church in this capacity. My prayer is that we will journey together through the Scripture to have a wholistic approach to the subject matter while looking specifically at the character traits listed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3:8-12. The only agenda is to understand the Heart of God in the use of His Holy Word. As doing so, I deeply desire us to love God with all that we are and to love others as we love ourselves as described in Matthew 22. Let us begin this journey together.

Before diving into the 1 Timothy 3 texts that lists the character qualities for those who serve and or will serve in the role of a Deacon, we will set the foundation. These Scriptures help understand the heart of God for those He leads to serve and understand the heart of those who are led to serve. First, let us begin with **Acts 6:1-7**. Take a moment to read the text before proceeding forward. While this text does not declare that these individuals are called Deacons, there are tremendous amount of Biblical Scholars that believe these individuals are the precursors to the role that is later called Deacon. These individuals were individuals that were of extreme importance who were called to serve people who were in need. In the most simplistic form, these individuals were not put together to lead or oversee the church. They were servants who were needed to help take care of those who were being neglected. By them stepping into this important role, it allowed those in leadership to devote more time to prayer, study of the God's Word, and the preaching and teaching of God's Word. As a beautiful result of all these individuals serving as God's has designed for them to do so in unity, Acts 6:7, "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Simply stated, people were being saved and people were maturing in their faith. Before moving to our next text, Acts 6:3 revealed the character traits that were used in order to chose these individuals to serve. These men were "... of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...". A forum of these character traits will be addressed in 1 Timothy 3:8cf.

While these individuals strived to faithfully serve, Jesus set the supreme example of being a servant to others which is found in **John 13:1-15**. Just as you did with Acts 6, take a moment to read these texts in John 13. Are we saying that a Deacon must literally wash people's feet in order to be a faithful servant? No, not necessarily. Jesus is setting the example for everyone that we are to be servants for God to one another. There isn't one "job" that should be considered beneath us in order to have a servant's heart. As He was in the upper room with His disciples within hours of being arrested then later crucified, Jesus was performing one of the lowest of servant responsibilities during the first century. No one wanted to perform such a task,

yet Jesus willing performed such a task in order to show by example of what it truly means to be a servant. Common sense concerning this Scripture in John 13, Deacon and all of us must be servants just as our Lord and Savior was a servant. Servanthood is at the core and motivation at every believer. As we dive into the key text concerning requirements for the role of a Deacon, we do not need to lose sight of the previous text that were just discussed to how the role came to existence and being a servant like Jesus.

As we dive into our Deacon character listing texts for the office of Deacon, take just a moment to read **1 Timothy 3:8-13** before proceeding forward. Are all of these characteristics of a deacon important? Absolutely, they are! Yet, as we proceed forward it is important to remember the previous texts from Acts 6 and John 13. Now back to the character traits of a Deacon and potential Deacon. All of the traits that are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 are very important and must be considered before choosing and serving as Deacon. Instead of focusing on all of these characteristics, people have a tendency of focusing on just one to determine whether someone is qualified or not to serve as Deacon. The qualifier is “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife,…” in 1 Timothy 3:12. 1 Timothy 3:12 shouldn’t be the controversial text. Instead, it is a absolutely beautifully text. As we dive in to understand it, let us understand different points of view concerning this text as it will be a main focus. As we proceed forward, people have a tendency of interpreting verse 12 verse one of the four or combination of a person can be a Deacon must be married to serve, Paul was addressing against polygamy, only one wife for life view, and or “one-woman man”.

First, some have interrupted 1 Timothy 3:12a to literally mean that a person can only serve as a deacon who are marred. In other words, those who are single and never intend to get married or even engaged to marry. Dr. Alan Dodson, in *The Deacon Ministry Handbook: A Practical Guide for Servant Leadership* published by Broadman and Holman, revealed that some very rigid interpretation of this text mean that someone can only serve as a deacon if they are married. Therefore, those that are a bachelor, divorced, or a widower are all disqualified to serve as a deacon. Dr. Dodson states, “This is not likely what Paul had in mind. Again, this is a list of the attributes of a man of a high moral caliber. A man’s current marital status is hardly indicative of his morality. Further, with this understating, both Paul and Jesus could not have served as deacons.”¹ Dr. Dobson’s conclusion does cause someone to not put some practical “stock” in this way of interrupting 1 Timothy 3:12a.

Second way of interrupting 1 Timothy 3:12a is believing that Paul was addressing Polygamy. It would make sense to come to this conclusion sense there are examples of Biblical individuals who had multiple wives: Jacob (named later changed to Israel), King David, Solomon, and etc. Once again Dr. Dobson, states, “Context helps us understand that such an interpretation is not accurate. While polygamy is seen in the Old Testament, it is not a feature of the Roman culture that dominated the first century.”² In addition, a long time pastor Jeremy Atwood in one of his papers about this subject matter states, “While polygamy was practiced, it was not the societal norm and only accepted within a small demographic of the Jewish population.

¹ *The Deacon Ministry Handbook: A Practical Guide for Servant Leadership* published by Broadman and Holman p 10.

² *The Deacon Ministry Handbook: A Practical Guide for Servant Leadership* published by Broadman and Holman p 10.

The church in Ephesus, where Timothy is the pastor, is primarily a gentile congregation made up of converts from paganism. Therefore, it would be highly unlikely that Paul is addressing polygamy here.”³ Pastor Atwood goes on further to state, “The world of concubines and the widespread practice of extramarital affairs serves as the backdrop for the church in Ephesus. As Timothy seeks to find men to serve in the positions of pastor and deacon, he is faced with the problem that the bulk of the membership... come from paganism.”⁴ As a point of clarification, 1 Timothy 3:2 also uses the same phrase as 1 Timothy 3:12a. Since they are the same, Pastor Atwood addresses both of these together while 1 Timothy 3:1-7 is about the Overseers/Pastors of a local church. Concerning just about 1 Timothy 3:12a, Dr. Dobson and Pastor Atwood bring forth the importance of context with striving to understand Scripture. Since Paul was encouraging a young pastor, Timothy, he was addressing the importance of marital faithfulness and sexual purity instead of addressing polygamy in this text of 1 Timothy 3:12. Polygamy wasn’t an issue with in the Greek and Roman culture of the Apostle Paul’s day. Let us move on to the third way of interpreting 1 Timothy 3:12a.

The third way of interpreting 1 Timothy 3:12a, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife...” to mean a deacon or eligible deacon must have only one wife for the rest of their life. If the Deacon or possible Deacon is a widower and not remarry, then he can be a Deacon. Within this view, a man is not allowed to serve as a deacon if he remarries a widower or divorcee. Yet, it is interesting to point out that the Apostle Paul knew the ancient Greek term for divorce. He even used it in the New Testament. Now, please hang with me as we dive into some important ancient Greek to simply prove Paul would use the term for divorce if he was specifically addressing divorce and divorce only. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, Paul utilizes the Kione Greek word for divorce which is ἀφιέτω (pronounced as aphieto). Kione Greek is the ancient Greek language of the New Testament. First, let us read in English 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 (ESV), “¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.” Notice that “divorce” in 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 are underlined. Now let us look at the Koine Greek of 1 Corinthians 7:12-13. While you may not be able to read it, notice the words that are underlined. They are the ancient Greek words for divorce. 1 Corinthians 7: 12-13, “¹² Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος·* εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον καὶ αὕτη συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν· ¹³ καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον καὶ οὗτος συνευδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ’ αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα.”⁵ Now, let us look at 1 Timothy 3:12 text in English, 1 Timothy 3:12 (ESV), “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.” Now look at the Kione Greek of the same text. As you look at it, see if you see the Kione Greek work for divorce which is ἀφιέτω in 1 Timothy 3:12, “διάκονοι

³ Atwood, Jeremy, Sexual Morality, Marital Fidelity, and the “One-Woman Man”: An Exegetical Interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:2b. P 5.

⁴ Atwood, Jeremy, Sexual Morality, Marital Fidelity, and the “One-Woman Man”: An Exegetical Interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:2b. P 12.

⁵ Aland, K., Aland, B., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (2012). *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th Edition, 1 Ti 3:12). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

ἔστωσαν μιᾷς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες,* τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενοι καὶ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων.”⁶ As you probably noticed, the Kione Greek word for divorce wasn’t used in this text here in 1 Timothy 3:12a like it was used multiple times in 1 Corinthians 7:12-13. If Paul wanted to specifically address divorce, he would have used the word. We have discussed three potential interpretations from 1 Timothy 3:12a with not a lot of support. Let us look at the fourth potential interpretation of, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife,…”

Finally, let us look back at the original language of 1 Timothy 3:12a in the previous section. When a person literally translates 1 Timothy 3:12a, “Let deacons each be a one woman man...”. Dr. Alan Dobson and conservative pastor and theologian, John MacArthur provide worthwhile perspective concerning this understanding of 1 Timothy 3:12a. Dr. Dobson, “What does it mean to be a one-woman man? Simply put, the married deacon is to possess a demonstrated devotion to his wife. A womanizer is not qualified to serve as a deacon. A man who’s life demonstrates a flippant view of matrimony — manifested in a series of unbiblical divorces and remarriages — is not qualified to serve as a deacon. A one-woman man who has been tested has proven that he takes his marriage seriously.”⁷ Furthermore, John MacArthur says, the Greek text literally reads “a one woman man”. Paul is not referring to a leaders marital status,...Rather, the issue is his moral, sexual behavior.” MacArthur goes on further to state, “a one-woman man is a man devoted in his heart and mind to the woman who is his wife. He loves, desires, and thinks only of her. He maintains sexual purity in both his thought life and his conduct.”⁸ If one would stop to read 1 Timothy 3:8-13 thoroughly, they would discover that this last interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:12a fits in more with the understanding of the over all text. Paul is listing character traits that are needed for someone to serve in this important servant role as a deacon. A deacon should strive to fulfill all of these character traits as best he can with devotion to his current wife. While there is tremendous support and understanding for a deacon and potential deacon to be devoted in their current marriage, one still must take a whole look at Scripture.

So, what about Jesus? What does Jesus teach concerning divorce? Before moving forward, take a moment to read Matthew 19:1-9. Notice what Jesus was doing in this text. He was pointing back to God’s original design for a man and woman who get married. Simple put, God hates divorce. Since God hates divorce, we too should hate divorce. Yet, let me be very clear. We should hate divorce for what it does to people and especially for the rest of the family. We should not hate the people involved. Chances are in my favor, that any kind of divorce is cause by some form of sin by one if not both spouses. The consequent of the sin or sins build to the point divorce takes place with no desire of reconciliation and forgiveness by one or both parties. As the divorce is taking place and takes place, it is literally a ripping apart of a family. With all the devastation that takes place, it is understandable why God hates divorce. Yet, Dr. Wayne Grudem gives great insight concerning this text during the time

⁶ Aland, K., Aland, B., Karavidopoulos, J., Martini, C. M., & Metzger, B. M. (2012). *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th Edition, 1 Ti 3:12). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

⁷ The Deacon Ministry Handbook: A Practical Guide for Servant Leadership published by Broadman and Holman p 11.

⁸ MacArthur, John, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary of 1 Timothy. Moody Press. P 105.

of Christ to help understand what Jesus was addressing. Even in the Jewish community, they were debating justification for why a man could divorce his wife as they were not holding marriage in high regard. During the time of Jesus, there were different Rabbis who were giving their interpretation of Old Testament Texts for support of divorce. Dr. Wayne Grudem reveals, “In this reply Jesus rebukes and corrects a first-century practice of easy divorce for trivial reasons. For example, the Mishnah said: The school Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her...and the school of Hillel say.. he may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him..Rabbi Akiba says, he may divorce here even if he found another fairer than she.... Rather than entering into this debate among rabbis, Jesus affirms God’s original plan for marriage and shows that it is still his ideal for all marriages.”⁹ Dr. Wayne Grudem goes on further to say, “Jesus’s statement “Because of your hardness of heart...” should not be understood to mean that only “hard-hearted” people initiate divorces, but rather, “because your hard-hearted rebellion against God led to serious defilement of marriages. The presence of sin in the community meant that some marriages would be deeply harmed by hard-hearted spouses to obtain a divorce. God was providing a partial remedy for the harm that a hard hearted spouse could do to the other person in the marriage.”¹⁰ So, should we obey and have the same view point as Jesus concerning marriage? Absolutely! We too should hate divorce for the damage and pain that is caused between two individuals and the “ripple” affect that it has on other members of the family and even friends. Yet, we should have a wholistic, Scriptural approach to it. For instance, it is worth pointing out that Jesus was breaking against the some Old Testament texts in approach to the consequence of marital unfaithfulness. For instance, Jesus didn’t encourage the people to fulfill the consequences of stoning to those who are caught in adultery as instructed in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. Take a moment to read the woman who was caught in adultery in John 8:4-5 cf. Instead of encouraging others to stone the woman, he states simply to the crowd, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” John 8:7. Once everyone drops their stones at their feet then leaves, Jesus forgives her of her adultery and encourages her to go and sin no more. Profoundly established, the woman is restored and reconciled to God by Jesus. Her sin of adultery, of unfaithfulness, of sinfulness has been forgiven and never to be held against her anymore. While we looked at what Jesus instructed about marriage, let us look at what Paul stated on the matter.

Once again, take a moment to read **1 Corinthians 7:10-15** before proceeding forward to discover what Paul says on the subject matter. If you remember from earlier with Matthew 19 where we had to remember the context as Jesus was addressing the Jewish people, we have to keep in mind the context of who Paul is writing to in Corinthians. While Jesus was addressing people of the same faith in God because they were Jewish, Paul was having to face a different situation of marriage between believers in Jesus and those who were not. In addition, Paul was having to address Paganism. As Paul was addressing these issues in marriage, he also addressed the issue of “slave” or enslavement that can happen in marriage. Dr. Wayne Grudem gives

⁹ Grudem, Wayne. What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage. Crossway p 19.

¹⁰ Grudem, Wayne. What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage. Crossway p 19.

insightful comments on 1 Corinthians 7:15, “The most likely interpretation of this verse is that it implies the freedom of obtaining a legal divorce and the freedom to marry someone else. The spouse who has been abandoned “is not enslaved” to the marriage partner. When an unbelieving spouse has deserted the marriage, God releases the believing spouse from the twin unending stresses of (1) a lifelong vain hope of reconciling with an unbeliever who has left and (2) a lifelong prohibition against enjoying the good blessings of marriage again.”¹¹ Dr. Grudem brings forth a worthwhile interpretation of these texts as it points out that it is impossible for a marriage to be reconciled and restored if one spouse has been abandoned by another. Does the abandoned spouse need to remain punished. In addition, he or she never to enjoy the blessing of marriage again? Now, we must always keep the principle of reconciliation in prayer and hope for a season, depending on what has taken place. Jesus gives us a pattern in Matthew 18:15-20 for reconciliation between people and between them and God. Importantly, we must always be led by God in all processes. Nowhere am I saying that a person must stay in an abandoned marriage, marriage where the spouse refuses a spouse to have faith in God through Christ, and or the a person has to stay in an abusive marriage. Yet, God was specifically leading Hosea to marry and stay married to Gomer who was known for being unfaithful and continuously proved it. Once again, Hosea was a prophet of God and was commanded by God to stay married and forgive Gomer to physically display God’s same relationship between Him and His people who were basically committing “adultery” by following false gods instead of the one true God. Back to 1 Corinthians 7, Paul indicated there are two legitimate reasons for grounds for divorce: 1) Adultery and 2) desertion by an unbeliever. Dr. Wayne Grudem goes on further to explain, “The position that I have briefly summarized here - that both divorce and remarriage are allowed when a person’s spouse has committed adultery or has irreparably deserted the marriage - is the most common position that has been held among Protestants since the Reformation.”¹² An example of a protest document of faith is the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1646 that states the following about divorce and remarriage, “In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out of divorce; and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead... Nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage. 24.5,6.”¹³

While still staying in the realm of 1 Corinthians 7 from Paul, there is something profound to bring up that Dr. Grudem also brings to light. As one knows, the Bible does address everything that we will face in life while not addressing everything specifically. For instance, the Bible does not address Cocaine or Meth. It does address being drunk which is like being high from drugs. It does address being able to take care of our bodies. Illegal drugs are harmful to our bodies and cause us to be in state like being drunk. So while the Bible doesn’t specifically address everything, it also does as we understand the “heart” of God and what the “heart” of the subject matter is about then

¹¹ Grudem, Wayne. What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage. Crossway p 19.

¹² Grudem, Wayne. What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage. Crossway p 37

¹³ Grudem, Wayne. What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage. Crossway p 38

applying it to our lives. While keeping this understanding, here is 1 Corinthians 7:15, “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. *In such cases...*” Dr. Grudem points out that while Paul was addressing these issues in marriages in Corinth, he was leaving it open to other possible justification for marriages to end based upon his use of phrase “In such cases...” Dr. Wayne Grudem states, “...he, Paul, implies that divorce is a legitimate possibility not only in cases of desertion by an unbeliever, but also in other circumstances that are similar to but not necessarily exactly like desertion.”¹⁴ In addition to the phrase “in such cases” there is the permission given to divorce in order to “...not enslaved...”. Dr Grudem rightly lists multiple examples of divorce that is justifiable and should not be held against the party that is enduring it: abuse (physical and physiological) from a spouse; a spouse abusing a child; extreme, prolonged verbal and relational cruelty; credible threats of serious physical harm or murder; incorrigible drug or alcohol addiction; incorrigible gambling addiction; and or Incorrigible addiction to pornography.¹⁵ If one would pause, who would expect someone to stay in a marriage to such a person who has committed the above and hold their divorce over their head for their life.

In conclusion, divorce is literally a ripping apart of individuals and their families. While it so damaging and should not be entered into lightly, there are several Biblical defenses of marriages ending in divorce. Does God still hate divorce? Yes. However, God offers grace, forgiveness, and restoration. If God offers these, we should do likewise to all. We should encourage people to follow the model of Jesus in John 8 to the woman caught in adultery by offering forgiveness and encouraging those that have sin to go and sin no more. These same principles also apply to a deacon and potential deacon. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the Apostle Paul is giving character and moral traits that a person needs to strive for in their lives. If we are honest with ourselves, no person can live up to each standard given. They will fall short in one or some. Yet, he needs to be trying his best to live in obedience to God. Specifically, 1 Timothy 3:12a is best to be interpreted as “one woman man”. A man who is devoted and faithful to his current wife if he is married. He is sexually pure and dedicated to her and her alone. Can a deacon who has been divorced be considered as a potential deacon? Yes, he can. However, there does need to be respectful conversation about it along with the other character traits that are listed by the Apostle Paul. If we are looking for sinless individuals to serve as Deacon or any positions of servanthood in the church and outside, no one would be eligible to serve. As Romans 3:23 states, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” In addition, Jesus reveals in Matthew 5:28 that a man who thinks lustfully about woman has committed adultery. The heart of Scripture is grace, forgiveness, and restoration through Jesus Christ. Once restored, then striving to live in obedience to God as best as we can with the Holy Spirit strengthen and guiding us as best as we can. Personally, we will not be perfect. Neither will a deacon or potential deacon be perfect. Yet, they should strive to live out the characteristics that are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and especially devoted to being faithful and loving to his current wife.

¹⁴ Grudem, Wayne. What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage. Crossway p 42

¹⁵ *ibid*, 43.