



**Ebenezer
Bible Fellowship Church**

**Special Congregational Meeting Minutes
April 10, 2011**

Prayer: Pastor Jason Hoy opened the meeting in prayer.

Roll Call:

- Elders present: Jason Hoy, Dick Bickings, Mark Culton, Wayne Batten, Andy Brimer, Mike Capaldi, Shawn Sommons
- Deacons present: George Hardy, Jason Lee, Joe Meier
- Deacons absent: Rob Christiansen, Bruce Eckel (Excused), Mark Hardy, Kamba Kalubi, Kevin Kritzberger, Rob Lofthouse, John Romero, Eric Sherer

Presentation of Elder Candidate: Shawn VanDoren (Attachment #1)

- Shawn addressed the group and referred to Phil 1:21 in his comments.
- There were no questions for or about Shawn specifically, however one question was posed: "How does the process of nominating elders work?" Wayne Batten, Chair of Nominating Committee provided the answer.
- By secret ballot, Shawn VanDoren was approved by the members in attendance to serve as Elder.

Annual Conference Preparation:

- Andy Brimer, First Delegate to the BFC Annual Conference provided a summary of a main issue to be voted on at conference this year: The eligibility of Pastoral candidates who have been divorced or are married to a woman who has been divorced. The BFC "Report of the Study Committee: Distinction Between the Office of Pastor & Elder with Reference to Divorce" was provided to the congregation over the past two weeks for review on the subject (Attachment #2). A letter from Pastor Jason Hoy regarding the topic of men with divorce in their history serving as Elder or Pastor was also made available to the congregation (Attachment #3).
- A period of questions and answers took place. Approximately 9-10 questions were asked.
- Consistent with Ebenezer's vote last year, it is our intention to support the changes to the qualifications consistent with the resolution provided and to be voted on at second reading during Annual Conference later this month.

Closing prayer and adjournment:

- Andy Brimer closed the meeting in prayer and it was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Capaldi,
Secretary to the Board of Elders

Special Congregational Meeting

Sunday, April 10, 7:00 - 7:30 pm

Everyone is invited to stay for a brief congregational meeting immediately following the Praise & Prayer Service.

Agenda

- Prayer
- Roll Call
- Discussion Items:
 - ◊ Voting on a new Elder (Shawn Van Doren)
 - ◊ Brief Review of potential change to the BFC Faith & Order
(Topic: Pastors who have been divorced, can they serve in the BFC?)
- Prayer

Introducing...

Shawn Van Doren

Elder Nominee

I am Shawn Van Doren (38 yr) and pictured with me is my wife (of 15 years), Jennifer and children Trevor (12 yr), Haley and Jacob (10 yr twins). We started attending Ebenezer Bible Fellowship in 2008 and became members in July of 2009. I was raised in a Catholic household and regularly attended Sunday service, however did not receive Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior until 1999. It was a culmination of events that surrounded me at this time including my father's death, my wife's nightly Bible reading, and hearing the Gospel message at a non-denominational service while we were traveling that brought me into a saving relationship with God. Being led by the Spirit from a Lutheran church to Ebenezer in 2008, I have had many opportunities of growth through Bible studies and fellowship. Jennifer and I have had the privilege of teaching fifth grade Sunday school for two years, coordinating the FaithWeaver Friends midweek program, and serving on the Kids Crossing Leadership team together. I have also had the opportunity to help with evangelism training and Share Your Faith Workshops, and currently serve on the Evangelism Committee. I also had an opportunity to lead the YACS in a Bible study recently, which was an enjoyable evening. The Spirit has given me a passion for God's Word and proclaiming the Gospel to the lost.



I am a critical care registered nurse but no longer provide bedside care. I have owned and operated several healthcare consulting companies over the last 12 years with the help of my two brothers and we currently operate the Health Science Institute (HSI, Inc.).

Attachment #2

Report of the Study Committee: Distinction Between the Office of Pastor & Elder with Reference to Divorce

This paper is the Committee's response to the assignment given by the 122nd Annual Conference as follows:

Whereas, the Study Committee on Divorce and the Office of Elder recommended that divorce shall not automatically and forever exclude a man from serving as a pastor or an elder, and

Whereas, the Annual Conference did not provide a Biblical basis for a distinction between pastor and elder, therefore be it,

Resolved, that the Chairman appoint a study committee of five pastors to examine whether Scripture warrants maintaining the distinction between the qualifications for elders and pastors as regards divorce, and be it further

Resolved, that legislation representing the product of the Committee's study be presented to the 123rd Annual Conference for first reading, and be it further

Resolved, that this action will constitute the answer to the congregation of Community B.F.C., Howell, NJ.

The Background Work of the Previous Study Committees

At the 116th Annual Conference (1999), the Conference passed, at First Reading, the following legislation, upon the recommendation of the appointed study committee:

"Because of the qualifications and dignity of the office of Elder, each Particular Church shall give careful consideration to ensure that a man who has been divorced or who has married a divorced woman is presently characterized as above reproach, and if married, faithful to and exclusively committed to his wife."

That conference also instructed the Committee to study whether this would also apply to a man being considered for ordination, and to report the next year.

The following year that committee noted, among other things, that "The Biblical evidence clearly teaches the equality of the office of elder and pastor," and that "There are no Biblical distinctions in the moral and spiritual qualifications for an elder or a pastor," and therefore that "Divorce alone does not automatically disqualify a man from being ordained."

The 117th Annual Conference (2000) passed, at First Reading, the following resolution:

"Because of the qualifications and dignity of the office of Pastor, when considering a man for ordination, the Ministerial Candidate Committee and Credentials Committee shall give careful consideration to ensure that a man who has been divorced or who has married a divorced woman is presently characterized as above reproach, and if married, faithful to and exclusively committed to his wife."

The 118th Annual Conference (2001) did not pass, at Second Reading, the proposed legislation that would have allowed a man who had been divorced or who has married a divorced woman to be at least considered for ordination. At the same time, the conference passed, at Second Reading, legislation to allow such a man, as described above, to serve as an elder in a local church, if he is presently considered above reproach.

The Work of this Present Study Committee

The charge given to this present study committee is to examine whether Scripture warrants maintaining the distinction between the qualifications for elders and pastors as regards to divorce. We have sought to build on the fine exegetical work and practical considerations given by the previous study

committees.

I. Examination of Relevant Scripture Passages

A. I Timothy 5:17-19 “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.”

Observations:

1. The worthiness of double honor is a clear reference to material remuneration. This is borne out by the phrase, “*the laborer deserves his wages.*”
2. The functions of an elder which are worthy of double honor include both ruling well and laboring in preaching and teaching.
3. These verses speak of distinctions in calling, gifting, and function in ministry. There is also an implied distinction relating to faithfulness (i.e. “*rule well*”). There is ***no distinction made***, regarding moral and spiritual qualification of church leaders.
4. To place a “*higher standard*” upon those gifted as preachers/teachers over against others serving as elders or deacons is a man-made distinction, but certainly cannot be substantiated from this passage.
5. Verse 19 makes no distinction between pastor and elder when it comes to the issue of discipline.

B. I Peter 5:1-2 “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you...” Observations:

1. Peter identifies himself in 1:1 as an apostle (one personally called by Christ and sent out on a particular mission). Here in 5:1 Peter identifies himself as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and partaker in the glory yet to be revealed.
2. While the calling and function of the office of apostle has ceased, and while the function of elder is still in existence, no distinction is made between the moral and spiritual qualifications of each office. Peter proclaims himself to be qualified on the same basis as any other man holding the office of elder.
3. When Peter addresses “*the elders among you, as a fellow elder,*” he gives solid evidence that “*what [he] urges upon elders, he exemplifies in his own life and office.*” (from Richard C. H. Lenski’s Commentary on 1 Peter)
4. Apostolic authority and elder authority relate not to quality of the man, but quantity of oversight. Lenski expounds upon this: “As apostolic elders they exercised oversight over many flocks; congregational elders exercised such oversight over the one flock that had called them. ‘Fellow elder’ and Peter’s simple ‘elder’ state that the apostolic office was the same office as that held by the congregational elders.”
5. In 5:2 Peter exhorts the elders (plural) to shepherd the flock of God. The particular aspect of shepherding here relates to “*exercising oversight.*” No distinction is made between elders as to moral and spiritual qualification. In this regard, all elders, including those who are gifted in ruling and those who are gifted as pastors/teachers, are on the same footing. There is no Biblical hierarchy of a “higher standard” or “higher class” of leadership qualification.

C. 1 Cor. 9:27 “No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

Can Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 9:27 be understood to mean a divorced man is precluded from consideration to pastoral ministry? Does Paul see divorce as the disqualifying deed that caused him to write, “No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”.

The following observations about the context help to answer this question:

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians 9:27 is the question of the Christian and meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1). Paul had addressed issues of marriage and divorce in chapter seven, but his statement in 8:1 ("Now about food sacrificed to idols...") shows clearly that he has left that subject. Thus it is unlikely that Paul is referring to divorce in 9:27.

In 8:1-11:1, Paul deals with knowledge about idols (8:1-6), the weak brother (8:7-13), and his own example (9:1-27). As an apostle, Paul had rights (9:1-14) which he refused to exercise (9:15-18). He committed himself to serving all people (9:19-23), and he exercised self-control in order to discharge the duties of his office (9:24-27). He offers Israel as an example to warn the Corinthians about idolatry (10:1-13), points out the incompatibility of the Christian and idol feasts (10:14-22), gives guidance on the exercise of the believer's freedom, and encourages his readers to follow his example in these matters (10:23-11:1).

Observations about the verse also help in answering this question:

- a. When Paul speaks of beating his body and making it a slave, he is referring to disciplining his body by abstaining from certain rights and privileges.
- b. Paul recognizes there are some activities or deeds that could potentially make him unfit for his work.
- c. The apostle's rights are to be subordinated to his office and ministry of preaching. He will not yield to these if they threaten to hamper the discharge of his apostolic calling, particularly his preaching ministry.
- d. Paul's motivation in subordinating his personal rights for the sake of others is to provide for a more effective gospel ministry and to protect from losing the prize, God's approval on his suitability to minister the gospel.
- e. Paul's commitment to denying himself his rights in order to maintain his qualification to serve as an apostle (vs. 19-23) is an example to all Christians to discipline their lives for Christ's sake (9:14).

It is evident 1 Corinthians 9:27 deals with Paul's practice of surrendering his rights as an apostle to protect the effectiveness of his ministry and to maintain God's approval. Therefore 1 Corinthians 9:27 should not be used to argue that men who have divorce in their past are precluded from consideration for gospel ministry.

D. Eph. 4:11-13 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

This is the only passage that specifically mentions the pastor at all. Note the following:

1. In a parallel passage, 1 Cor. 12:28-29, the pastor is not mentioned at all: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?"
2. F.F. Bruce comments: "The two terms 'pastors (shepherds) and teachers' denote one and the same class of men....they are the same people as are elsewhere called elders and bishops, one of whose qualifications is being 'apt to teach'."
3. The word "pastor" in Eph. 4:11, when translated "shepherd" in the other places, can refer to the church elders, as in Acts 20:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." Note the parallels as Paul addresses the church leaders in Acts 20 as

“Elders” (*presbuteros*) in v. 17 and as “Overseers” (*episkopo*) in v. 28, and to “Be Shepherds” (*poimainein*) in v. 28. F. F. Bruce comments: “The leaders of the Ephesian church are indiscriminately described as elders, bishops... and shepherds (or pastors).”

Therefore this lone mention of the gift/ office of a pastor, instead of creating some higher moral standard for the office, rather shows how interchangeable the term is with that of elder and overseer, and, in conjunction with the other passages mentioned above, gives evidence that all these church leaders were held to the same moral and spiritual standards.

E. Leviticus 21 It is possible that some might want to use the stricter standards that were given for the priests in the Old Covenant as a basis for a similar higher standard for the pastor today, particularly in regards to divorce.

Lev. 21:7-8 “They (the priests) must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God. ⁸ Regard them as holy, because they offer up the food of your God. Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy—I who make you holy.”

Lev. 21:13-15 “The woman he (the priest) marries must be a virgin. ¹⁴ He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, ¹⁵ so he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy.”

This argument can be answered in a number of ways. First, all believers in Jesus Christ are now priests, both royal and holy (1 Peter 2:9), so there is no longer a two-tiered level of holiness. Second, we do not think that the BFC wants to impose some of the other standards listed in Lev. 21 on its pastors today, such as whose funerals he may attend (21:1-4, 11) or how he cuts his hair or beard (21:5), or whether he is allowed to marry a widow. We understand that these requirements for the priests were outward pictures of the true holiness that the Lord now gives us in the New Covenant.

F. Other Relevant New Testament Passages

If there is a spiritual and moral distinction between pastors and elders that would require a higher standard for pastors in the matter of divorce, then we would expect to see some evidence of that distinction in how Scripture treats the offices. But instead what we find is that the leaders of each local church are grouped together without such distinction.

In the book of Acts, the church leaders or overseers are repeatedly referred to as elders, not as the pastor and the elders.

Acts 14:23 “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church...”

Acts 15:2 “.... Paul and Barnabas were appointed...to see the apostles and elders about this question.

Acts 15:22-23 “Then the apostles and elders ...decided to choose some of their own men and send them to AntiochWith them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers.....”

Acts 20:17, 28 “...Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ...²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood....”

In Phil. 1:1, Paul addresses the whole church, “together with the overseers (*episkopois*) and deacons.” No mention is made of the pastor in distinction from the other church leaders.

The moral and spiritual qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are for overseers or elders, but there is no separate or stricter list of moral and spiritual standards for choosing a pastor. These two lists cover both elders and pastors.

Hebrews 13:7 and 17: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Here the writer commands his readers to remember and obey “your leaders” and to submit to their authority. If there were ever a place for the writer of Scripture to indicate that the pastor of a church should be given higher authority or held to a higher moral standard, we might expect to find it here. But instead, all the church leaders are equally held up as examples to imitate and as authorities to obey.

James 3:1 “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” If teaching elders are seen as pastors, does this verse give some basis for a higher moral standard for pastors with regards to divorce? We may note that if this is what James intended to mean, he could have simply said, “Not many of you should presume to be pastors,” but he did not write that. Instead James left it to include a wider scope of all who wished to teach God’s Word, which would certainly include elders. This verse raises the moral bar for all Christian teachers (1 Cor. 12:28), not just for pastors.

II. Addressing Personal and Cultural Perceptions

We could find no statistics dealing with the narrow scope of our study. There are some statistics that discuss divorce as it relates to clergy but just with regard to the fact that it does happen, and that most will or have remarried. Obviously the number of clergy who have divorce in their background prior to their appointment or call is dependent on their acceptance by a congregation (if independent) or denomination (and subsequently a congregation).

Here are some possible questions that a church may raise:

1. *“What will the people in our churches think and what will outsiders think?”* Statistical information on the prevalence of divorce would lead to the conclusion that people are probably more understanding of the circumstances that lead to divorce, since they likely have been touched by it in some way. What church people will think would seem to be shaped by things such as family culture, church culture, pastoral teaching, and personal experience. This could become a subjective, emotional issue in addition to being an objective (and contextually) Biblical one. *Churches would do well to consider here the teaching of Biblical Principles for Living 104-4.3 concerning Christian liberty.*

2. *“Allowing men with divorce in their background will either send us down a liberal path or lower the dignity of the office of pastor (or both.)”* What does God regard as being important issues to Him? *We believe that God’s Word is concerned about ongoing-character issues rather than past behavior. In examining qualifications of a man to be ordained, issues such as pride, gossip, dishonesty, or being inhospitable should prevent someone from being considered eligible, not a past forgiven sin or even being married to someone with divorce in her background.* It is often quoted that “God hates divorce” (Malachi 2:16), however the context needs to be considered. Divorce among the people and the priesthood, as well as their actions regarding offerings and worship in chapter 1, was symptomatic of a heart that stopped caring about God and was indicative in all of their attitude and behavior. This is far different than a life that is lived in grace, obedience, and forgiveness through repentance of sin and faith in Christ.

If the Bible teaches us anything, it is to raise the bar of grace. In the book of Acts, when Gentiles were receiving the Holy Spirit, Jewish believers had to completely rethink their understanding of God’s relationship to man in light of Christ’s death and resurrection. This was a huge shift! What Jesus did in His life and through the church was to consistently defy conventional thinking. It is not the consideration of divorced men that would lower the bar. What would lower the bar would be a blanket acceptance of anyone wanting to be credentialed regardless of his life’s circumstances. Our desire is to open the door for eligibility on a case-by-case basis. Men and women sin and are victims of sin. If forgiveness has been offered and received, why are we preventing a good, godly man from consideration?

In examining a man for ordination who has divorce in his background, we affirm the five considerations that require wisdom and discernment that have already been stated in the 2000 *Yearbook*, on p. 214:

1. Culpability
2. Resolution of the Divorce
3. Disposition of church discipline
4. The amount of time since the divorce
5. The chronological relationship of divorce to conversion.

III. Relation to the BFC Faith & Order

Article 204-2.4 instructs us that “Elders, as leaders of the people, are chosen by the membership of the church on the basis of Scriptural qualifications.” Those Scriptural qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1, and they form the same basis for determining the moral qualifications for an elder, and/or pastor.

“The BFC acknowledges that the Biblical evidence clearly teaches the equality of the office of elder and pastor. There are no Biblical distinctions in the qualifications for a pastor or for an elder. Therefore, just as divorce alone, does not automatically disqualify a man from being an elder, so too divorce alone does not automatically disqualify a man from being ordained.” (p. 213 of the 2000 Yearbook)

Recommendations

Whereas, the Biblical evidence clearly teaches the equality of the office of elder and pastor, and

Whereas, there are no Biblical distinctions in the moral and spiritual qualifications for an elder or a pastor, and

Whereas, divorce alone does not automatically disqualify a man from being an elder, therefore, be it

Resolved, that this study committee recommends that the local church, the Ministerial Candidate Committee and the Credentials Committee *give due consideration to this report in examining men for ordination and for candidating at a church*, and further

Resolved, that Article 206-1.4 (6) be added to the *Faith & Order* at first reading:

“Because of the qualifications and dignity of the office of Pastor, when considering a man for ordination, the Ministerial Candidate Committee and Credentials Committee shall give careful consideration to ensure that a man who has been divorced or who has married a divorced woman is presently characterized as above reproach, and if married, faithful to and exclusively committed to his wife.”

(Adapted from the 2000 Yearbook, pp. 215-216)

Study Committee on the Distinction between the Office of Pastor and Elder with Reference to Divorce: Eric R. North, Chairman; Louis Pronnicki, Secretary; Jonathon W. Arnold, Sr., Delbert R. Baker, II, Allan R. Vivona

Dear members of the congregation,

We understand that there are different views within evangelical circles on the issue of divorce, and pertinent to our immediate discussion, the relationship between leadership and divorce. The different views are explained and acknowledged in the following statements below. Please consider the Biblical explanations given which will at least help you understand why the Bible Fellowship Church is discussing this and may potentially vote to allow divorced persons or someone who is married to a divorcee be ordained as a BFC Pastor.

We appreciate our denomination's desire to be thoroughly biblical. While some fear this potential move to be a slippery slope toward a loose stance on divorce, be assured that this is not the case. God hates divorce, and so does the BFC. However, we realize that Jesus has given biblical grounds for divorce, i.e. adultery (Matthew 5:32), but even that doesn't hinder our attempt to reconcile the marriage for His glory. Consider what the denomination has said:

Few would argue the fact that divorce is a serious problem within the church of Jesus Christ. The church is not exempt from the problems that plague our culture. The church's response to divorce must be clearly biblical. The church must seek to be Christ-like – neither more severe nor more lenient than Jesus Christ Himself was as He embodied “grace and truth.” While maintaining God's holy standard, the church must also demonstrate grace in the midst of human failure. The BFC has clearly spoken that “divorce is the dissolution of a divinely instituted bond and a breaking of the relationship established by marriage.” The church “looks with disfavor on the practice of divorce on any grounds whatsoever and believes that the only scriptural basis for a severance of the marital union is adultery.”¹

Before we get to the supplemental resources mentioned above, it would be prudent to inform you of the history of this issue within the Bible Fellowship Church. The following paragraphs include the historical work that has been done on this subject. It comes from the 123rd (2006) BFC yearbook because another study committee was formed in 2005 to address this issue of whether or not divorced men or men married to a divorced woman could become ordained ministers in the BFC.

“At the 116th Annual Conference (1999), the Conference passed, at First Reading, the following legislation, upon the recommendation of the appointed study committee:

‘Because of the qualifications and dignity of the office of Elder, each Particular Church shall give careful consideration to ensure that a man who has been divorced or who has married a divorced woman is presently characterized as above reproach, and if married, faithful to and exclusively committed to his wife.’

That conference also instructed the Committee to study whether this would also apply to a man being considered for ordination, and to report the next year.

The following year that committee noted, among other things, that ‘The Biblical evidence clearly teaches the equality of the office of elder and pastor,’ and that ‘There are no Biblical distinctions

¹ Bible Fellowship Church Yearbook, 2000, pg. 211.

in the moral and spiritual qualifications for an elder or a pastor,’ and therefore that ‘Divorce alone does not automatically disqualify a man from being ordained.’

The 117th Annual Conference (2000) **passed**, at First Reading, the following resolution:

‘Because of the qualifications and dignity of the office of **Pastor**, when considering a man for ordination, the Ministerial Candidate Committee and Credentials Committee shall give careful consideration to ensure that a man who has been divorced or who has married a divorced woman is presently characterized as above reproach, and if married, faithful to and exclusively committed to his wife.’

The 118th Annual Conference (2001) **did not pass**, at Second Reading, the proposed legislation that would have allowed a man who had been divorced or who has married a divorced woman to be at least considered for **ordination**. At the same time, the conference **passed**, at Second Reading, legislation to allow such a man, as described above, to serve as an **elder** in a local church, if he is presently considered above reproach.”

AT the 123rd Annual Conference (2006), the study committee recommended the following

Whereas, the Biblical evidence clearly teaches the equality of the office of elder and pastor, and **Whereas**, there are no Biblical distinctions in the moral and spiritual qualifications for an elder or a pastor, and

Whereas, divorce alone does not automatically disqualify a man from being an elder, therefore, be it

Resolved, that this study committee recommends that the local church, the Ministerial Candidate Committee and the Credentials Committee *give due consideration to this report in examining men for ordination and for candidating at a church*, and further

Resolved, that Article 108-5 be added to the *Faith & Order* at first reading:

‘Because of the qualifications and dignity of the office of **Pastor**, when considering a man for ordination, the Ministerial Candidate Committee and Credentials Committee shall give careful consideration to ensure that a man who has been divorced or who has married a divorced woman is presently characterized as above reproach, and if married, faithful to and exclusively committed to his wife.’

(Adapted from the 2000 Yearbook, pp. 215-216)

This recommendation was voted down by a very small margin in 2006; however, the issue came up again at last year’s annual conference which was passed at first reading. A final vote for second reading will be made at this year’s annual conference.

In summary, the conference allows divorced men or a man married to a divorced woman, who fulfills the qualifications as stated above, according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, to serve in the office of elder. However, the conference does not allow a divorced man or a man who has married a divorced woman to pursue ordination and/or candidate for a Senior Pastorate within a BFC church at this time. This will be voted upon this year. There is no current ruling stated anywhere that a divorced man or a man married to a divorced woman can not serve as an associate pastor. That statement has been confirmed by several of the denomination’s leaders.

With that said, please consider the following biblical explanation for allowing a divorced man or a man married to a divorced woman to serve as a pastor. 1 Timothy 3:2 is most commonly cited in regard to this issue: "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..."

The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

Should a divorced man be permitted to serve as a pastor? The first thing to say is that the details of any particular situation are always pertinent. If we proceed immediately to a blanket answer we are going to end up both mishandling Scripture and mistreating people.

The Bible provides grounds for divorce: adultery (Mt. 19:9) and abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15). This does not settle the question about pastors and divorce, but it does tell us to acknowledge that a pastor, like anyone else, can be the innocent victim of a spouse's covenant-breaking sin. Moreover, the biblical standards for the office of elder – which includes pastors – contain guidance about marriage. 1 Timothy 3:2-7 says "an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife." (Titus 1:6 cites this qualification identically.) Does this mean that such a man must never have been divorced? What if he was divorced before he was converted to faith in Christ? In my judgment, that would not disqualify a man from the ministry anymore than Paul's persecution of the church disqualified him. What if he was divorced twenty years ago, and has since been faithfully married for many years? It is noteworthy that the Bible does not say that an elder can never have been divorced, but that he must presently be faithful to one wife. I do not believe, therefore, that a long-past divorce necessarily bars a faithful man from serving.

ESV Study notes on the "husband of one wife"...

"The meaning of husband of one wife (Gk. *mias gynaikos andra*) is widely debated. The Greek phrase is not common, and there are few other instances for comparison. The phrase literally states, "of one woman [wife] man [husband]." (1) Many commentators understand the phrase to mean "having the character of a one-woman man," that is, "faithful to his wife." In support of this view is the fact that a similar phrase is used in 1 Tim. 5:9 as a qualification for widows (Gk. *henos andros gynē*; "one-man woman," i.e., "wife of one husband"), and in that verse it seems to refer to the trait of faithfulness, for a prohibition of remarriage after the death of a spouse would be in contradiction to Paul's advice to young widows in 5:14. Interpreters who hold this first view conclude that the wording of 3:2 is too specific to be simply a requirement of marriage and not specific enough to be simply a reference to divorce or remarriage after divorce. In the context of this passage, the phrase therefore prohibits any kind of marital unfaithfulness. (2) Another view is that "husband of one wife" means polygamists cannot be elders. Interpreters who hold this view note that there is evidence of polygamy being practiced in some Jewish circles at the time. On this view, the phrase means "at the present time the husband of one wife," in line with other qualifications which refer to present character. On either of these views, Paul is not prohibiting all second marriages; that is, he is not prohibiting from the eldership a man whose wife has died and who has remarried, or a man who has been divorced and who has remarried (these cases should be evaluated on an individual basis). (3) A third view is that Paul is absolutely requiring that an elder be someone who has never had more than one wife. But that does not fit the context as well, with its emphasis on present character. On any of these views,

Paul is speaking of the ordinary cases and is not absolutely requiring marriage or children (cf. v. 4) but is giving a picture of the typical approved overseer as a faithful husband and father."

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem

What Is the Meaning of "Husband of One Wife"? The qualification "*the husband of one wife*" (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) has been understood in different ways. Some people have thought that it excludes from the office of elder men who have been divorced and have then married someone else, since they have then been the husband of two wives. But this does not seem to be a correct understanding of these verses. A better interpretation is that Paul was prohibiting a polygamist (a man who *presently* has more than one wife) from being an elder. Several reasons support this view: (1) All the other qualifications listed by Paul refer to a man's *present status* not his entire past life. For example, 1 Timothy 3:1–7 does not mean "one who has *never been* violent," but "one who is *not now* violent, but gentle." It does not mean "one who has *never been* a lover of money," but "one who is *not now* a lover of money." It does not mean "one who has been above reproach for his whole life," but "one who is now above reproach." If we made these qualifications apply to one's entire past life, then we would exclude from office almost everyone who became a Christian as an adult, for it is doubtful that any non-Christian could meet these qualifications.

(2) Paul could have said "having been married only once" if he had wanted to, but he did not.²⁰ (3) We should not prevent remarried widowers from being elders, but that would be necessary if we take the phrase to mean "having been married only once." The qualifications for elders are all based on a man's moral and spiritual character, and there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that a man who remarried after his wife had died has lower moral or spiritual qualifications.²¹ (4) Polygamy was possible in the first century. Although it was not common,

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20. The Greek expression for "having been married only once" would be ἄπαξ γεγάμενος using the word "once" (ἄπαξ, G562) plus a perfect participle, giving the sense, "having been married once and continuing in the state resulting from that marriage." (Such a construction is found, for example, in Heb. 10:2, and a similar construction is found in Heb. 9:26. Related expressions with aorist verbs are found in Heb. 6:4; 9:28; and Jude 3.)

Another way Paul could have expressed the idea of having been married only once is using a perfect participle of γίνομαι (G1181) to say "having been a husband of one wife" (γέγονας μιᾷ γυναικὶς ἀνὴρ). This is, in fact, the force of the requirement for widows in 1 Tim. 5:9, "having been the wife of one husband" (the force of the perfect participle γεγονυῖα (from γίνομαι, G1181) carries over from the previous phrase, and all the qualifications for enrolling widows in 1 Tim. 5:9–10 speak of past history in their lives). But in 1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:6 the sense is different, because present tense forms of εἶμι (G1639, "to be") are used: (literally) "It is necessary for a bishop *to be* blameless, the husband of one wife...."

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21. Some interpreters in the early church did try to exclude remarried widowers from church office (see, for example, *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.2; 6.17 [third or fourth century A.D.], and *Apostolic Canons* 17 [fourth or fifth century A.D.], but these statements reflect not a biblical perspective but a false asceticism which held that celibacy in general was superior to marriage. (These texts can be found in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series, 7:396, 457, and 501.)

polygamy was practiced, especially among the Jews. The Jewish historian Josephus says, “For it is an ancestral custom of ours to have several wives at the same time.”²² Rabbinic legislation also regulated inheritance customs and other aspects of polygamy.²³

Therefore it is best to understand “the husband of one wife” to prohibit a polygamist from holding the office of elder. The verses say nothing about divorce and remarriage with respect to qualifications for church office.

²

However, Chrysostom (d. A.D. 407) understood 1 Tim. 3:2 to prohibit polygamy, not second marriages after death or divorce (see his *Homilies* on 1 Tim. 3:2).

²² 22. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.14; in 17.19 he lists the nine women who were married to King Herod at the same time.

²³ 23. See Mishnah, *Yebamoth* 4:11; *Ketuboth* 10:1, 4, 5; *Sanhedrin* 2:4; *Kerithoth* 3:7; *Kiddushin* 2:7; *Bechoroth* 8:4. Other evidence on Jewish polygamy is found in Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 134. Evidence for polygamy among non-Jews is not as extensive but is indicated in Herodotus (d. 420 B.C.) 1.135; 4.155; 2 Macc. 4:30 (about 170 B.C.); Tertullian, *Apology* 46.

²Grudem, Wayne A.: *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich. : Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994, S. 916