

Truth and Spirit Ministries

THE DIVORCED IN MINISTRY

Fact or Fiction? - I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 is saying that divorced people cannot serve in the ministry.

Fiction: The Lord gave Paul qualifications for those who would serve in the ministry for the purpose of having godly leadership in the body of Christ. Some denominations teach that this means a Christian who has a call to leadership is disqualified because they have had a divorce. Their interpretation is that a man can only be married to one woman (or vice versa) in their entire lifetime. God's interpretation is much different though. How do we know what God meant? His will and purpose for man in marital relationships is made clear in His word. To understand what the truth is, we must rightly divide God's Word.

The issue that Paul is addressing here is not divorce but polygamy. During the time of the establishment of the young Church, polygamy was still practiced in certain societies and even among some of the Jews. Jesus answered the Pharisees regarding the subject of God's will concerning the marriage relationship in Matthew 19:4-6. God's purpose in creating the marriage relationship has always been that a husband should have one wife and a wife should only have one husband. Although divorce is clearly not God's will because He states in His word that He hates it (*Malachi 3:16*), provision was made for it under the Law of Moses. (*Matthew 19:7-8*) In verses 4-6, Jesus is teaching that God created man to have only one wife and that the two become one flesh. Later, Paul brings greater clarity to Jesus' statement when giving the qualifications for those desiring to be a bishop. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife..." (*I Timothy 3:2*) In the Greek, this word one means *in opposition to many, single*. [*Joseph Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.*] Paul was teaching that those who had more than one wife (or lived in polygamous relationships) were not qualified for ministry. The marriage relationship is really a type of Christ and the Church. (*Ephesians 5:31-32*) Jesus only has *one* bride, not more than one or many.

Although God hates divorce, it is not the unpardonable sin. If divorce alone would disqualify people from serving in the ministry, then it would not be forgivable and God would be holding that against divorcees by preventing them from entering the ministry. God knows that there are no perfect people and that we make mistakes. Because some of the biblical patriarchs had multiple wives, (Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon) some believed that God approved of such marriages. To the contrary, God never approved polygamous marriages. Even under the Law of Moses men were forbidden to take more than one wife. (*Deut. 17:17, Malachi 2:15*) What Paul is addressing here is someone that has more than one wife at a time since this would be against God's divine will. In effect, a person may only be married to one person at a time since the two (not three, four or more) become one flesh. God was just reemphasizing His will regarding this matter under the New Covenant.

God forgives those who have divorced. He does not hold their past against them. Those who teach that divorced people are disqualified from ministry need to re-examine their beliefs. If the Lord can forgive those who have divorced, then we should as well. Those who have never suffered the pain of divorce are not to be judging and self righteous towards others that have been. We do not have the right to sit in that seat, only the Lord does. The woman at the well had been married and divorced five times and was then living with a man who was not her husband, yet this did not prevent the Lord from using her as a vessel to proclaim Him as Christ in her own city. (*John 4:28-30*) An interesting note is that God Himself was married to Israel and then divorced her because she broke her Covenant (marriage relationship) with Him. (*Jeremiah 3:8*) If an individual were disqualified from being a leader in the New Testament Church because of divorce, Jesus would not have qualified to be in the office of High Priest, since He is the Lord of the Old Testament and God does not go against