

“Can Deacons Be Divorced?”

Please let me know what your thoughts are on the qualifications for deacons when the Bible speaks in 1 Timothy 3:12 about a husband of one wife. I know of a man that is serving as a Deacon that has been divorced 2 times and now he is married to his third wife. This has really bothered me. I have talked to a couple of people and they cannot give me answer, one of these being a minister. They say that if they go to Christ and ask for forgiveness that it is OK but I do not know what the scriptures say about being a Deacon. Thanks for your help.

I have served as an elder and as a chairman of the elders at our church and have spent a good deal of time studying the qualifications for elders and deacons. The general consensus of evangelical scholars on the phrase “husband of one wife” in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is that it means the husband of one living woman. That is, it allows for a man to serve as an elder or deacon if his wife has passed away and he has remarried. This would seem to allow for a man to serve in these church leadership positions if he has been divorced and remarried. This is where it gets tricky. Jesus seemed to allow for divorce in the case of adultery (Matthew 5:31-32) and Paul added an allowance for divorce if left by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15). If a man seeking the office of elder or deacon had an unbelieving wife who left and divorced him, I would consider him eligible for office as long as he meets the other qualifications. However, if a believing wife and husband have sought divorce and the husband has remarried and is now seeking the office of elder or deacon, this would require a much deeper investigation into the circumstances. If the grounds for divorce were not biblical, then the subsequent marriages are suspect. I would not be inclined to allow such an individual to stand in church leadership because this would reflect poorly on their character and they may indeed be

married in the eyes of God to two women. Paul instructs a married woman who leaves her husband to remain unmarried unless it is to be reconciled to her husband (1 Corinthians 7: 10-11).

The question today remains when you have a remarried couple who have sought forgiveness for their sin, what then? They may be forgiven and brought fully into the fellowship of the church but that does not necessarily mean the husband is qualified for an official position of leadership in the church. Elders and deacons are held to a higher standard. If I were divorced while a believer, I would no longer consider myself eligible for official leadership in the church. I can still serve and have a ministry but not as an official elder or deacon. I believe each situation must be evaluated individually and in depth. A man who has been divorced must expect to be questioned thoroughly about the nature of the divorce and whether any sin involved has been fully repented of, if he desires to serve as an elder or deacon. Also please understand that different evangelical churches have come to different conclusions on this question.

I am not a theologian nor a pastor, but this is my opinion as I read the Scriptures and have had to deal with this question as an elder.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries