

The Doctrine of Monogamy

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward... Titus 1:5-7 NASB

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine... 1 Tim 3:2-3 NASB

In the two portions quoted above of the letters of Paul to Titus and Timothy, respectively, we see the injunction that an elder or deacon or bishop must be a husband of one wife. It is often thought that these portions are the foundation of monogamy in Christianity. For this reason some have taken time out to point out that the injunction was specifically about church elders, implying that other Christians are not bound by it. They infer therefore that there is no clear-cut instruction against polygamy for the whole church.

This message is supposed to be short and so I will get straight to some points.

First, Christianity is not a religion of commandments; we operate by faith. This means that we get to know God and understand His mind concerning things so that we walk according to the mind of Christ and not just looking for commandments. This is why even though the expression cigarette-smoking is not in the scriptures, enlightened Christians are totally against it because we understand it is defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). We do not believe we should indulge the flesh; the habit of smoking has been shown again and again to be dangerous to human health and is not at all of any benefit. People start smoking simply because of worldliness and bowing to peer pressure. For this reason the church has done well in condemning cigarette smoking and the use of tobacco in other ways. The basic principle is that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and we have a general commandment to guard and to keep anything the Lord entrusts us with (Gen 2:15). I accept that this is not to be equated with some other weightier sins that are expressly condemned in the scriptures (Yes indeed, sins have different gravities, just like matters of the law have different weights. 1 Jn 5:16,17; Matt 23:23). I have just used this issue to illustrate how we Christians relate with the will of God.

Now let me get back to the issue of monogamy as the Christian rule for marriage.

Let me start by saying that the basis for this rule is *not* the commandments of Paul about the appointment of elders. In fact, looking closer at those scriptures one can easily see that Paul was speaking of something more than monogamy. I stand to be corrected, but I do not think polygamy was rife in those societies in which Timothy and Titus were ministering at that time. As much as this scripture may be applied to rule out polygamists from deaconship, the fact is that Paul was speaking more about marital fidelity than about many wives. If you realize that there is no other Greek word for wife and husband other than the same which is applied to woman and man, respectively, it becomes clear therefore that the expressions could easily be

read as “a man of one woman.” Combine this fact with the other instructions in the context and see that he was speaking more on the person’s moral qualities. Paul was saying that a man who womanizes or one who has girlfriends or concubines outside the home is not fit to be a leader in church. He must have a reputation of having only one woman, his wife, in his sexual life. The Weymouth and New Living Translation renderings of 1 Tim 3:2 bring out this point clearly.

*A minister then must be a man of irreproachable character, **true to his one wife**, temperate, sober-minded, well-behaved... (Weymouth)*

*So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. **He must be faithful to his wife**. He must exercise self-control... (NLT)*

Many men who have only one wife in churches these days are actually not fit for leadership in the body of Christ according to Paul’s standards; their having one wife hasn’t qualified them because they are not of one woman. They are involved with another woman or women apart from their wives.

Now, we can easily see that even though Paul addressed the verses to his men, Timothy and Titus, concerning the requirements for elders, he was not all saying that other Christians are permitted to do the opposite. He couldn’t at all have been trying to imply that only deacons needed to be sober-minded and well behaved; he was only emphasizing that the leaders among the people of God must be people of irreproachable character. We do not excuse other Christians from these qualities; we only say that until they reach the point of being exemplary they cannot hold office in the body of Christ. This is partly because they are the examples others are supposed to follow and also are the face of Christianity to the outside world.

The basis of the rule of monogamy is the very words of Jesus Christ our Lord, as he reiterated the rule set in place in Genesis.

*"But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and **the two** shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer **two**, but one flesh. Mark 10:6-8 NASB*

The emphasis of God and the Lord Jesus was on TWO. It is two that becomes one. It cannot be three or more. That is the basis of monogamy. God made the one woman for the one man Adam, and that order was not broken for a long time. Even when mankind began to break it, God never approved it really. The Lord Jesus came later and reminded us of what the plan of God is. As Christians we pursue marriage after the plan of God, and that is clearly that of one man and one woman.

Those who went against this order in times past, even though they received the blessings of God in many other areas, were not blessed in this one area. The Lord simply overlooked the error they were walking in.

God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. Acts 17:30 NLT

Let us take David as an example. God never gave David as an example of marriage; the man's home was a disaster. He married many wives and got into trouble because of another woman. His marriage and home was a cause for regret. God just overlooked it and refused to talk about it. Solomon came after him and amplified his iniquity of having many wives, and that caused an everlasting damage to their lineage. They multiplied wives and reaped the fruit of it.

The only people that God ever gave as examples of marriage in the Bible are Abraham and Sarah, Adam and Eve, and Christ and the Church (also Israel and the Lord). You will notice that the only problem Abraham ever had was when he omitted the commitment to being a man of one woman, and he went into Hagar. The problem remains on earth till today.

Those who have married more than one wife have regretted it. Many of us do not realize that after his life of many women, Solomon was an advocate of monogamy. Yes, he recommended one wife!

Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil. Eccl 9:9-10 NLT

Did you notice that he did not say wives? He went through it and realized that what he experienced was not the will of God at all.

What have I said in this short message? I have reiterated that monogamy is the plan of God, and Christians should not at all make excuses for polygamy. In Christianity we go for the mind of God, and monogamy, we have seen, is the plan of God and His perfect order for marriage. We are people aiming for the perfect plan of God for life and for our individual lives. We brothers in Christ are proud to each be a "man of one woman", both in monogamy matters and in marital fidelity matters.



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