

Married Only Once?

The letter of 1 Timothy indicates that bishops (3:2) and deacons (3:12) are to be married only once (or, literally, to be “the husband of one wife”). What does this mean? Four suggestions:

- They are not to practice polygamy. This seems to be obvious, but perhaps it needed to be stated, given converts from many cultures.
- They are to practice fidelity, fulfilling the role of husband only for the woman to whom they are actually married. Again, this seems to be an obvious expectation, though no doubt an important one.
- They are not to remarry after being divorced. This seems consistent with Paul's teaching elsewhere (1 Cor. 7:10–11; cf. Mark 10:11–12).
- They are not to remarry after being widowed. This seems stricter than Paul's usual policy (Rom. 7:1–3; 1 Cor. 7:39). Still, Paul does say elsewhere that it is best not to remarry (1 Cor. 7:8, 32–35, 40), and the bishops and deacons may be expected to model ideal behavior beyond what would be requirements for all.

Most scholars assume that at least the first two ideas would be included in what is intended here; the third and/or fourth ideas might be intended as well.