

Doctrine of Elder

The Husband of One Wife

1 Timothy 3:2

“An Elder is to be the husband of one wife.”

Commentary

The husband of one wife. Of one wife *mias gunaikos*. One at a time, clearly (*Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

Commentary

The husband of one wife. This means that he should be a married man but no polygamist; and have only one wife, i.e. one at a time. It does not mean that, if he has been married, and his wife die, he should never marry another. The apostle's meaning appears to be this: the Elder should not be a man who has divorced his wife *and* married another; nor one that has two wives at a time. It does not appear to have been any part of the apostle's design to prohibit second marriages, of which some have made such a serious business. But it is natural for some men to tithe mint and cummin in religion, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law. (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*)

Commentary

The husband of one wife. He must be the husband of one wife; not having given a bill of divorce to one, and then taken another, or not having many wives at once, as at that time was too common both among Jews and Gentiles, especially among the Gentiles. (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

Commentary

The husband of one wife. It is the most obvious meaning of the language, and it would doubtless be thus understood by those to whom it was addressed. At a time when polygamy was not uncommon, to say that a man should "*have but one wife*" would be naturally understood as prohibiting polygamy.

The marriage of a second wife, after the death of the first, is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as wrong. The marriage of a widow to a second husband is expressly declared to be proper (1 Cor 7:39); and it is not unfair to infer from that permission that it is equally lawful and proper for man to marry the second time. But if it is lawful for any man it is right for a minister of the gospel. No reason can be assigned against such marriages in his case, which would not be equally valid in any other. Marriage is as honorable for a minister of the gospel as for any other man (compare notes on Heb 13:4); and, as Doddridge has well remarked, "*Circumstances may be so adjusted that there may be as much reason for a second marriage as for the first, and as little inconvenience of any kind may attend it.*"

There was a special propriety in the prohibition, if understood as prohibiting polygamy. It is known that it was extensively practiced, and was not regarded as unlawful. Yet one design of the gospel was to restore the marriage relation to its primitive condition; and though it might not have seemed absolutely necessary to require of every man who came into the church to divorce his wives, if he had more than one, yet, in order to fix a brand on this irregular practice, it might have been deemed desirable to require of the ministers of the gospel that they should have but one wife. Thus the practice of polygamy would gradually come to be regarded as dishonorable and improper, and the example and influence of the ministry would tend to introduce correct views in regard to the nature of this relation. (*Barnes' Notes*)

Commentary

The husband of one wife. Confuting the celibacy of Rome's priesthood. Though the Jews practiced polygamy, yet, as he is writing about a Gentile church, and as polygamy was never allowed among even laymen, the ancient interpretation that the prohibition is against polygamy in a candidate-bishop is not correct. It must mean that, though laymen might lawfully marry again, candidates for the episcopate or presbytery were better to be married only once. As in 1 Tim 5:9 "*wife of one man*" implies a woman married but once, so "*husband of one wife*" must mean the same.

The feeling among the Gentiles, as well as Jews (cf. Anna, Luke 2:36-37), against a second marriage would, for expediency and conciliation in matters indifferent, not involving compromise of principle, account for Paul's prohibition as to one so prominent as a bishop or a deacon. Hence, the stress laid in the context on the repute in which the candidate for orders is held among those over whom he is to preside (Titus 1:6).

The council of Laodicea and the apostolic canons discountenanced second marriages, especially in candidates for ordination. Of course, second marriage being lawful, the undesirableness holds good only under special circumstances. Also, he who has a wife and virtuous family is to be preferred to a bachelor; for he who is himself bound to discharge the domestic duties will be more attractive to those who have similar ties, for he teaches them not only by precept, but also by example (1 Tim 3:4-5). The Jews teach a priest should be neither unmarried nor childless, lest he be unmerciful. So in the synagogue, 'no one shall offer up prayer in public unless he be married.' (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*).