



The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC)

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## **Divorce and Remarriage with Reference to Church Leadership**

### ***Preliminary Remarks***

#### **A. TOPIC**

The topic of divorce and remarriage has been discussed at several General Conferences of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) during the past three decades. On each occasion sincere efforts were made to faithfully interpret the Biblical passages which relate to the issue.<sup>1</sup> In 1994 significant amendments were approved in the *General Constitution and By-Laws* which made it permissible under certain conditions for ministers to officiate at marriage ceremonies where one, or both, of the participants has been previously married and a former spouse is still living. The significant condition for remarriage is that the former marriage covenant must have been broken by the one exception that Jesus offered as a reason for divorce – one of the partners has established a sexual relationship with someone other than his or her spouse.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the 1994 amendments the PAOC recognized the “exception clause” of Matthew 19:9 as a reason for divorce but did not apply it to the issue of remarriage. After the extensive studies for the consideration of the topic at both the 1992 and 1994 General Conferences, it was the opinion of the study committees and the General Executive that there are grammatical reasons to have the “exception clause” refer both to divorce and to remarriage.<sup>3</sup> The studies revealed that in the social and religious context in which Jesus spoke, if a divorce was justifiable there was no question about the right to remarry.<sup>4</sup>

The General Conference in 1994 amended the restrictions on a PAOC credential holder officiating at the remarriage of divorced person and also approved an official statement on *Marriage and the Family* which incorporates the “exception clause” based on “marital unfaithfulness”(Matt 19:9) as permission for divorce and remarriage. Since the matter related to conviction and conscience, it was stated and understood that no minister should feel obliged to adopt the official amended position.

## **B. CURRENT ISSUE**

In the 1998 General Conference the issue of divorce and remarriage surfaced again – this time in reference to the marital status of PAOC credential holders as well as local church lay leaders. Basically, the question arose as to whether the “exception” that was recognized in 1994 which permitted ministers to officiate at remarriage ceremonies should extend to church leaders themselves – should credentialed ministers and local church board members be allowed to remarry while their former spouses are still living? Further, should these two categories of leaders be allowed to function in their roles if they are married to spouses who were previously married and whose former spouses are still living?

A committee was appointed to study the issue and report its findings to the general constituency prior to the 2000 General Conference. The committee understands that it was not asked to re-study the topic of divorce and remarriage but rather to focus specifically on the issue as it relates to *credential holders* and *board members*. The General Executive also asked the committee to expand its study to cover the question whether or not non-PAOC ministers who are divorced and remarried should be allowed to minister in PAOC churches or at specific events directed by PAOC credential holders.

## **C. PROCESS**

The process selected by the committee to carry out its mandate involved several steps which are listed below:

- request submissions from the general constituency;
- survey other church organizations on their positions and request any study papers they might have;
- define the major issues;
- assign relevant research topics to individual members of the committee;
- compile the pertinent data in a draft paper
- refine the draft and present the findings to the General Executive with any appropriate recommendations
- rewrite the paper to incorporate observations and revisions mandated by the General

Executive

- circulate the final paper, with the approval of the General Executive, to the constituency

### **Submissions**

About 35 written submissions were received from interested people in the PAOC constituency. The submissions presented the arguments for both sides of the question as to whether or not the PAOC should amend its qualifications for ministerial credentials with reference to marital status. Generally, the presentations were thoughtful and sincere. They appear to have been written by individuals who have in common a great respect for the authority of Scripture but who nevertheless came to a variety of conclusions as to what the Scriptures are saying. The submissions performed a good service by identifying the main points on both sides of the topic. Some of the significant points which were made in support of both sides can be listed in a summary which reveals the contrasting issues:

- the cross provides for the forgiveness of all sins, including divorce
- ☉ forgiveness of sins removes the spiritual judgment but not the natural or legal consequences
  
- the Biblical requirement for pastors and deacons to be the “husband of but one wife” is directed against the practice of polygamy or is a statement that a person should be entirely devoted to his current spouse
- ☉ the Biblical requirement for pastors and deacons to be the “husband of but one wife” means that the Christian leader should not be re-married while a former spouse is still living
  
- there can be no discrimination in the church with reference to the recipients of God’s grace
- ☉ God’s callings and giftings are based on His sovereign purposes which means that God does not “discriminate” (as the word is presently used) but he does make decisions based on a criteria which transcends human choices
  
- every believer is a member of “a holy priesthood” regardless of past sins and is able to offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus”
- ☉ the priesthood of all believers means that every believer can approach God personally through Christ but no believer is a “priest” for others persons
  
- there is no distinction between the laity and the leadership with reference to the fulfillment of the Great Commission
- ☉ God calls, gives gifts, and establishes tests among believers to determine eligibility for certain roles in His service

- obviously God has blessed the leadership of individuals both in recent times and in the Bible who had blemishes on their marital record
- ☉ God blesses His Word regardless of the instrument but warns that if personal failure becomes a public issue the effectiveness of the Word can be injured
- traditional views are not correct just because they have been held for a long time or by a majority of individuals or groups
- ☉ as society drifts away from Biblical values, there is an ever increasing pressure to re-interpret Scripture to allow for new standards
- every believer has the right to be treated as an individual and should not be unnecessarily encumbered with denominational guidelines
- ☉ the standards which are determined by the whole Fellowship provide security for the individual members and present Christian standards to our society, both inside and outside of the church, which give an example of God's better way

### **Other Church Organizations**

The committee requested information from ten other Pentecostal organizations concerning their positions on the issue of divorce and remarriage with reference to leadership. A major non-Pentecostal organization which shares our evangelical views on the inspiration and authority of the Bible was also contacted. Excerpts from a sampling of the responses demonstrate the variety of interpretations and applications:

#### ***Assemblies of God (USA)***

The Assemblies of God have discussed the issue in at least three of their General Councils and have retained a position similar to the current PAOC position. The following quotes are taken from the official articles:

*Local Church Leadership.* (1) *Standard of offices of bishop, or elder, and deacon.* Since the New Testament restricts divorced and remarried believers from the church offices of bishop, or elder, and deacon, we recommend that this standard be upheld by all our assemblies (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:12). However, we recommend that all other opportunities for Christian service for which these believers may be qualified be made available to them. (2) It is understood that recommendations are not binding, but local assemblies shall maintain the prerogative of setting their own standards" (Article IX, 5c).

*Ministerial Credentials.* We disapprove of any married minister of the Assemblies of God holding credentials if either minister or spouse has a former companion living (Article IX, 5e).

#### ***Assemblies of God in Australia***

The Australian church makes provision for divorced and remarried people to be credentialed ministers initially in a separate category and under specified conditions which relate to the cause of the divorce, the time of the divorce in relation to conversion, and the stability of the current marriage. An excerpt from the Australian documents helps illustrate the special treatment they apply to divorced and remarried ministers and applicants for ministry.

*The Ministry. . . .*

3. Christian persons divorced and remarried on unscriptural grounds, or married to a divorced person who has divorced on unscriptural grounds after his or her conversion, may not enter or remain in ministry.
4. Those persons who as Christians unscripturally divorce and remarry, or who as Christians are the guilty party in a marriage failure, shall not be permitted to enter the credentialed ministry at any level, and that all other persons who are divorced and remarried shall be permitted to enter the ministry and shall be granted a Specialized Ministries Certificate, a Christian Worker's Certificate or an Associate Ministerial Certificate, subject to the following conditions:
  - a) The candidate has not been remarried more than once since conversion;
  - b) The candidate is not clearly seen to be a major contributor to the breakdown of his/her marriage since conversion;
  - c) The candidate has been a Christian for at least five years;
  - d) The candidate whose remarriage in the opinion of the National Executive Presbytery has been stable for at least two years may apply for a Specialized Ministry Certificate or a Christian Worker's Certificate. On issuance of an appropriate certificate all the normal conditions of such will apply, ie: That three years will lapse before the candidate is eligible to be invited to apply for an Ordained Ministers Certificate.
  - e) All the conditions outlined in this statement shall also apply to the applicant's spouse ("A statement on marriage and divorce and matters which affect the church and individual believers arising therefrom," Section F )

***Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada***

The Apostolic Church of Pentecost has taken a position which allows for divorce and remarriage if one of the following conditions is present: the divorce occurred prior to conversion, the person is the "innocent party" in the divorce, the born again person has been deserted or divorced by an "unbelieving partner":

*Obligations and Rules of the Ministry. . . .*

"Divorce is a departure from the purposes and perfect plan of God. There are, however, certain circumstances where divorce, though not required, is permitted.

A person who has been divorced on scriptural grounds, as set out in Items 1,2,3, and 4 below, is free to remarry and shall be granted the privileges of Christian fellowship

and service, subject to the provisions of Item 4 below.

- Therefore
1. A person who has been divorced prior to a born-again experience is free to remarry.
  2. A person who is the innocent party in a divorce is free to remarry.
  3. A person who is born again subsequent to marriage to an unbeliever and is deserted and divorced by the unbelieving partner is free to remarry.
  4. The board of presbyters shall examine and rule each individual divorce, consulting with the pastor or elders related to the situation and the credential committee shall be subject to that ruling” (By-Laws, Section 11 b).

### ***Assemblies of God of Malaysia***

This church has maintained a rigid stance with reference to the retention of the traditional Pentecostal position:

“Since divorced-and-remarried persons in the ministry usually cause stumbling, reproach, and division, whatever may have been the cause of the divorce, we disapprove either ordaining or licensing to the gospel ministry those who have remarried and are now living in a state of matrimony while former companions are living” (Article IV, B, 1c).

### ***The Christian and Missionary Alliance***

The CMA is an evangelical denomination which does not grant ministerial licenses to a divorced and remarried individual who has a former spouse still living. The religious organization appeals to the local church to utilize discretion in the selection of lay leaders in the church. Again, excerpts from CMA documents describe the position of the organization:

#### ***Accreditation, Licensing, Ordination . . .***

“Divorced person, or persons who are married to divorced persons, shall not be elected or appointed to district or national offices and shall not be eligible for accreditation or licensing with The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada.”

#### ***Statements . . .***

“Discretion, however, must be exercised in the choice of divorced and remarried persons for places of leadership in the church. While all the believers are equal members of the Body of Christ, not all members are qualified equally for every office in the church. The offices of elder (spiritual leader) and deacon (business leader) in the church are to be filled by those of high moral and spiritual qualifications, whose pattern of exemplary Christian living is so established that it may be followed” (Remarriage, 4.12).

### **Defining the Issues and Assignments**

After analyzing the available data, the committee listed the significant areas and assigned different topics to the individual members of the committee to do further research:

- Edenic model of marriage
- Theological issues related to forgiveness
- Standards for leadership
- Exegesis of key Biblical passages
- Jewish understanding of divorce and remarriage
- Early church views on remarriage of leaders
- Reformation views on divorce and remarriage
- Pentecostal views (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) on remarriage of leaders
- The relationship between the Culture and the Church
- The impact of divorce and remarriage on children
- Legal implications

### **Compiling and Refining the Paper**

The individual members presented their extensive research to the entire committee for evaluation and discussion. After consensus was reached on the important points and a unanimous conclusion was formed as a result of the research submissions and committee debates, a draft paper was composed which incorporated the pertinent material. Subsequently, the committee critically examined the draft and refined it to focus on the most basic Biblical issues. The study resulted in three statements of focus and direction:

- the unique importance of marriage;
- the qualifications of church leaders;
- the role of leaders as shepherds.

The paper was presented to the General Executive for review and suggested revisions in its February 2000 meeting. The General Executive reviewed the paper a second time and suggested revisions in a special meeting held in Winnipeg in June. The final draft of the material presented below was submitted to the members of the General Executive for their approval before the document was mailed to the constituency.

### ***The Consideration***

#### **A. THE UNIQUE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE**

##### **The Edenic Standard**

The central issue is the institution of marriage and its fundamental role in the plan of God for the human race. Any discussion of marriage and the family must begin with the first two chapters of Genesis. When the topic has been discussed by the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, Paul, and important spokesmen throughout the history of the church, the starting point usually has related to the institution of marriage in Genesis. At the heart of God's plan to glorify Himself in creation was to make male and female creatures in His image and instruct them to reproduce:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:27,28; see 5:2).

Further, the Bible record indicates that after completing human creation by separating the woman from the man, God officiated at the first marriage by bringing them together as separate beings to become one in marriage:

Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Gen. 2:22-24).

The concept of God's ideal being "one woman for one man for life" is based on this passage of Scripture.

Obviously, God majors in unity. We understand that God exists as three persons but that He is the One God. What a mystery! The fundamental traits of humanity are patterned after the Creator. Theologically, it is apparent that since the One God is a social being existing eternally as Trinity, a married couple is in some way a reflection of God's nature existing both as separate persons and as one in marriage unity. That's also a mystery.

### **The Old Testament Prophets and the Marriage Covenant**

God's people in the Old Testament found the marriage relationship to be a helpful metaphor in depicting the bond between God and His people. Israel is viewed as the wife of God in a covenant relationship with Him: "I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine" (Ezek. 16:8). The unfaithful activity of God's people results in a serious charge: "You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!" (16:32). But in an amazing display of grace, God commits Himself to the covenant: "Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting



covenant with you” (16:60).

The topic of covenant occurs again in Malachi where God expresses displeasure with wife Israel because the people, especially marriage partners, are not maintaining their covenants with each other:

7 For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction--because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. . . .

10 Have we not all one Father ? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

11 Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. . . .

13 Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.

14 You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your *marriage covenant*.

15 *Has not the LORD made them one?* In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

16 “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel . . . (Mal. 2:7,10,11,13-16).<sup>5</sup>

The “one” expression in verse 15 is very reminiscent of the passage in Genesis 2:24 – “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

### **Jesus’ Reference to the Edenic Marriage**

When Jesus was asked to comment on the topic of divorce, He put the subject in context by referring to the ideal that God established in the Garden of Eden:

“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?” (Matt.19:4-5).

Commenting on the Divine strategy, Jesus explained that when a man and a woman come together in marriage “they are no longer two, but one” (Matt.19:6). With the human sinful inclination to divide, however, Jesus appealed to humanity to not break the oneness of marriage: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (19:6). It was true, Jesus noted, that Old Testament regulations provided terms for divorce and remarriage but He asserted that the regulations were only

initiated because sin had worked its way in a tangled world. By dealing with the subject as He did, Jesus made it clear that He did not approve of the contemporary application of the Hillel school of theology to sanction divorce “for any and every reason” (Matt. 19:3; see also Deut. 24:1-4) nor did he accept the inferences of the Pharisees who stated that Moses “commanded” the divorce document rather than “permitted” it (Matt. 19:7,8) because of their sinfulness. Jesus made it very clear that the permissive regulations associated with Moses were not God’s first choice.

It is quite clear that in focusing on God’s creation of male and female and the marriage union, Jesus is re-enforcing standards which uphold God’s intentions rather than the historical accommodations that had been made for the hardness of human hearts. He declares Himself very directly, “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matt.19:8,9).

The question which is not addressed in Jesus’ remarks about the exceptional clause regarding the “marital unfaithfulness” of a spouse which permits the other spouse to get a divorce and remarry is whether such an exception would equally apply to ministers who are divorced and remarried as it does generally to the people of God. In the context the Pharisees raised the question with Jesus there is no reference to the spiritual status of the individuals who might be engaged in divorce or of their roles. One side of the issue in the current discussion suggests that the “exception clause” applies equally to everyone. Others point out that the qualifications for leadership are not part of the verbal exchange between the Pharisees and Jesus and that subject would be dealt with later as the church is organized to fulfil the Great Commission. The apostle Paul believed that he had the right as he was directed by the Spirit to deal with issues concerning marriage and certain categories of individuals that had not been dealt with by Jesus in His teaching.<sup>6</sup>

### **Paul’s Reference to the Edenic Marriage**

The apostle Paul also went to the passage in Genesis 2 on marriage to illustrate the unity between Christ and His church – another mystery! In the letter to the Ephesians he devotes several verses to the relationship between husband and wife and compares it to the experience the members of the church have with one another and Christ:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph. 5:31:33; see also 1 Cor. 6:16).

The church should endeavor to keep in view the marriage ideal which God has established

since it is a very helpful model which illustrates the permanence of God's relationship with gospel believers. Historically, the church has had to make difficult decisions concerning its conformity to, or rejection of, cultural standards with reference to divorce and remarriage – including the marriages of church leaders.

### **Marriage: the Church, Culture, and Children**

Marriage and the family are relevant and controversial topics in today's culture. In social and political discussions the issues have gone far beyond the legalities related to divorce and marriage – basically in Canadian society anyone can get a divorce and be eligible for remarriage for any reason as long as the spouses have been legally separated for one year. Nowadays the major concerns seem to relate to definitions of marriage and family, common law relationships, same sex unions, eligibility for partner's social benefits, and child support.

Marriage is first of all the union between a female and a male but it is also the institution which provides life and nurture for children. When a marriage break downs, the impact on the children is of prime significance. It is important to notice that in Paul's lists of qualifications for leadership positions in the church, he refers to a candidate's children as well as the marital status.<sup>7</sup>

According to the 1996 Canadian Census, 47 per cent of Canadian children live in homes where at least one of the parents has been divorced. In 1999, half of all live births were outside of a marriage relationship where the two biological parents were committed to each other. Social analysts can only guess at the impact the present status single-parent, common-law, and blended families will have on this and future generations. Recent research shows that college students "from divorced families had significantly more sexual partners than students from intact families."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, they were also more open to sexual experimentation. Another American study, published less than a year ago, states that "more and more young people are growing up with no personal life experience of successful marriage and little or no confidence that they could be in an enduring marital relationship." The authors of the study argue that when young people look at marriage today it has as an institution lost "much of its legal, religious and social meaning and authority." They also note that "marriage is quietly losing its place in the language" as judicial and legislative bodies seek to redefine "spouse."<sup>9</sup>

In the 1950s, when divorces were difficult to acquire, families were expected to stay together "for the sake of the kids." By the 1990s, with the restrictions related to divorce and the stigma removed, unhappy spouses were encouraged to believe that it was in their best interests as well as their children to break up the family. What may contribute to a parent's happiness, however, may

detract from a child's sense of security and well-being. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead observes that

family disruption is best understood not as a single event but a string of disruptive events: separation, divorce, life in a single-parent family, life with a parent and live-in lover, the remarriage of one or both parents, life in one stepparent family combined with visits in another stepparent family, the break up of one or both stepparent families. And so on.<sup>10</sup>

At a time when attention is needed most by the child, separation and divorce results in parents spending more and more time on themselves and their own well being and giving less and less consideration for their children. Financial pressures and a variety of new stresses make it impossible for separated and divorcing parents to make the same kind of investment in their children as parents in an intact family. Children grow up facing less financial stability, poorer emotional support for the normal development processes and often have the added stresses of mobility, loss of school, relatives, friends, and neighborhood. Dafoe states,

According to a growing body of social-scientific evidence, children in families disrupted by divorce and out-of-wedlock birth do worse than children in intact families on several measures of well being. Children in single-parent families are six times as likely to be poor. They are also likely to stay poor longer.<sup>11</sup>

It must be noted that not all children of divorce are permanently damaged. They all go through some trauma in the process, but many of them find ways of making the developmental adjustments that provide for a healthy adulthood. It is not all bad, but for those who are negatively affected, the impact can be extremely serious.

The single parent sometimes feels pressure to rush into another relationship in order to provide a new parent for the child. Thank God for those situations where the new family is functional with strong internal ties. Blended families (step-families), however, have a statistically lower rate of survival than first marriages and the potential negative impact on children may be even greater than in the single-parent family. Referring again to the Whitehead article, it is stated that blended families generally increase the problems for children:

In general the evidence suggests that remarriage neither reproduces nor restores the intact family structure, even when it brings more income and a second adult into the household. Quite the contrary. Indeed, children living with stepparents appear to be even more disadvantaged than children living in a stable single-parent family. . . . Step-families disrupt established loyalties, create new uncertainties, provoke deep anxieties, and sometimes threaten a child's physical safety as well as emotional security. . . . For a single parent, remarriage brings new commitments, the hope of enduring love and happiness, and a relief from stress and

loneliness. For a child, the same event often provokes confused feelings of sadness, anger, and rejection.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the above, if the decision about divorce and remarriage of church leaders were to be made with reference to the impact on children, the recommendations would be rather persuasive. The informed opinion seems to be that unless the marriage relationship of the two biological parents is marked by physical and/or sexual abuse, children fare better in their original family even if the parents are not particularly happy, fulfilled, or even in love with each other. Although there are obviously exceptions to the contrary, especially among Christians, the general evidence suggests that for children divorce is worse than a defective home. It is the privilege of the church to serve the world by following the teaching of the Chief Shepherd and pointing everyone to God's intention for marriage as outlined in the Garden of Eden.

In summary, the observation that must be made is that marriage seems to be in a category of its own. It is the final stroke in God's whole plan of creation; it illustrates in a physical manner the doctrine of the Trinity which exists eternally as a social unit; in its God-intended form, it illustrates the covenant relationship between God and Israel as well as the union of Christ and His church; and it provides the safest haven to nurture children.

## **B. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF CHURCH LEADERS**

### **The Call for a Review**

The current request for a review of the issue arises out of the need to clarify the standards for credential holders and lay leaders in the local church whose first marriages have ended in divorce and who have remarried or are contemplating remarriage with the former spouse still living. From the perspective of credential holders, the issue is based on the rights and wishes of an otherwise qualified individual to serve as a minister in spite of a second marriage with the former spouse still living or being married to a person with a former spouse still living. From the perspective of local church nominating committees who have the responsibility of presenting candidates to stand for the board at the annual business meeting, there may be candidates who appear in many respects to be well qualified for leadership roles but whose marital status does not meet the present interpretation and application of Paul's "husband of but one wife."

While this particular call for review of marriage and divorce may be coming from the leadership sector of the church, there is an awareness that the outcome will have a significant impact on more than leaders. The general membership of the church looks on and will be affected to some extent by the decisions of General Conference. The critical tension which faces the Fellowship is

rather straightforward: How can we balance the sincere desire of individuals to participate in leadership over against the responsibility of providing for the flock leadership models which reflect God's ideal? How do we respond when there is the possibility in Christian faith and practice that individual privileges may conflict with the welfare of the group?"

## **Leadership**

God is actively involved in saving a people for His own purposes and pleasure. His plan is to employ all believers who submit their lives to Him in reaching others with the good news of His love and forgiveness. While the work of Christ and God's grace is the sole source of salvation, He has set moral standards for His people to observe while living in a relationship with Him. The apostle Paul was concerned about the ability of the church to order itself to function effectively in the world. He explained in his letter to Timothy, "I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know ["the rules to guide you"<sup>13</sup>] how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The moral standards are the same for all – whether rank and file members or called and gifted leaders. But it is also clear that God's Word demands that leaders especially demonstrate their calling by giving evidence of their qualifications in their service and lifestyles.<sup>14</sup>

We are particularly interested in the two categories of leadership which Paul referred to also in his letter to the Philippians: To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the *overseers* and *deacons*" (1:1). In the first letter to Timothy where he is delivering the "rules" for the family of God which is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (3:15), Paul outlines the moral and character requirements for overseers and deacons. Observance of these leadership qualifications is an integral part of the maintenance of order in the church and its strategy for carrying out its mission. It is clear that overseers and deacons occupy positions of sacred and public trust. The emphasis of Paul's treatment of their qualifications is that they must be, and must be *seen* to be, people of proven integrity in their relationships and service.

The apostle Paul displays in his own life his personal conviction of the responsibility of leaders to measure up to standards necessary for the sake of the gospel. In his letter to the Corinthians he stated:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. . . . I have become *all* things to *all* men so that by *all* possible means I might save *some*. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

He was very aware of the importance of perceptions which observers might have of Christian leaders even in non-critical areas. For example, he required Timothy to be circumcised just to avoid any objection the Judaizers might have: “Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3). This is the same Paul who took Peter to task for playing politics with the doctrine of salvation by grace. It seems apparent that he encouraged Timothy to experience the rite only because the leader must have the respect and acceptance of the hearers.

As indicated above, this current study is particularly interested in the qualifications of the leadership roles which were discussed by Paul and well established in the church by the end of the first century of Christianity: overseers, elders, and deacons.<sup>15</sup> In three passages of Scripture (Acts 20:17 - 28; Titus 1:5 - 7; 1 Pet. 5:1 -4), overseer and elder seem to refer to the same individuals. Without engaging in any debate related to distinctions which developed in these two offices early in the second century, it may be said for our purposes that these offices were equivalent to what we would call *pastor*. The specific qualifications of overseers and elders are outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, respectively. Basically, the qualifications apply to important things like a believer’s relationship with family and community as well as personality, character, and giftings. The qualifications for deacons are also listed in 1 Timothy 3. While *deacons* are not expected to have the same communication gifts, the apostle Paul makes it clear that “They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons” (1 Tim.3:10). The significant facts are that (1) only believers who meet certain standards are eligible for leadership roles (at least in reference to overseer, elders, and deacons), and (2) there are different qualifications for different leadership roles. To make the point clearly, it appears that not every one who has been forgiven of every past sin, including sins that may be related to divorce and remarriage, is eligible for a leadership position in the church.

Judging from what the Word teaches, it may be concluded that the qualifications for leadership are enforced because of the importance which the Scriptures place on modeling Christian values and virtues. The passage dealing with qualifications in 1 Timothy employs a literary device known as an “inclusion.” The core idea is placed at the beginning and end of the “inclusion” with the illustrative points discussed in the middle. The essential point of the “inclusion” about the Christian leader’s qualifications is that the leader must be “above reproach” in the eyes of the local community -- both inside and outside of the church:

1 Timothy 3:2 – “the overseer must be *above reproach*”

1 Timothy 3:7 – “He must also have a *good reputation* with outsiders”

Other references also underline the importance of the perception observers have of church officials:

1 Timothy 3:8 – “Deacons, likewise, are to be men *worthy of respect*”

Titus 1:6 – “An elder must be *blameless*”

Acts 6:3 – “choose seven men from among you who *are known* to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

The areas where church leaders should have established a high standing may be categorized under headings like marriage relationship, character and personality traits, spiritual maturity and experience, disposition towards people and material possessions, abilities related to responsibilities, managerial success in the home, and a significant amount of experience and maturity. It is important to re-emphasize the point that the *good reputation* of a church official should be discernable by both believers and non-believers.

### **Biblical Marriage Qualifications of Leaders**

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul places the issue of a bishop’s marriage relationship at the top of the list – “the husband of but one wife” (3:2). After mentioning several other important characteristics, Paul returns to the family issue: “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) (3:4,5). In Titus, Paul places the elder’s qualification of being a good manager in the home alongside the “one-wife” precept: “An elder must be blameless, “the husband of but one wife,” a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (1:6). He even adds the notion that the children of elders must be “believers.”

In the list of qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy, Paul repeats “the husband of but one wife” requirement and adds the need to “manage his children and his household well” (3:12). Curiously, the marital reference is near the bottom of the deacon list. It is difficult to say whether Paul regards marital status of less importance for deacons – regardless, it is still on the list. Incidentally, when Paul discusses the qualifications of deacons, he makes a reference to their wives, repeating the idea that they must be “worthy of respect” (3:11).

After a thorough study of the qualifications for Christian leadership presented in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9, it was apparent that competent evangelical scholars have advanced very different interpretations of these passages. At the outset, it must be conceded that there is no real consensus among Bible scholars on the correct interpretation of the expression “the husband of but one wife.” Without rehearsing the arguments in any great detail, the major positions may be



summarized as prohibiting

- singleness
- simultaneous polygamy
- successive polygamy
- unfaithfulness in the current marriage.

Specific references to representative groups in the history of the church may illustrate the different interpretations.

*Singleness.* There is little scholarly support for the opinion that Paul was declaring that a person must be married in order to qualify as a church leader. While it is true that some false teachers of the day were speaking against marriage (1 Tim 4:3), probably because of their gnostic views about the evils of the body, it is not likely that Paul was here promoting marriage as a necessity. He was clearly on record as being in favor of marriage for those who *wished* to have a spouse. As a matter of fact, rather than demanding that a leader be married, Paul offers some words of commendation to singles: “An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:32). Indeed, it is most likely that both Paul and Timothy were unmarried.

*Simultaneous Polygamy.* The simple solution which is accepted quite readily in some current evangelical groups is to say that the expression is a prohibition of having more than one wife at a time. In other words, if a person is to be qualified to be an overseer, elder, or deacon that person must not be in a polygamous marriage relationship. While it is true polygamy was practiced among the Jews during the first century, there is no evidence that it was practiced in any Christian community and there are no exhortations in the Scriptures to abstain from polygamy – it just was not an issue among Christians.

Further support for the view that Paul is not speaking about polygamy is his use of the same expression in reference to widows in 1 Tim 5:9 (“the wife of one man”). The concept of a woman having more than one husband at the same time (polyandry) was totally foreign. To imagine that Paul was saying that church leaders should not be married to more than one spouse at a time is very unlikely.

*Successive Polygamy.* Restrictions related to the third position, known as *successive* polygamy, may be subdivided into two main sections: (1) a church leader who is a widower should not remarry nor should a non-married church leader marry a widow; (2) a church leader who is divorced should not remarry. The clearest expressions of section (1) are found in the writings and

canons of the early church (patristic period). The views and interpretations of the early “Fathers” may be significant in that they were closest in time to the writings and teachings of the apostles.<sup>16</sup> An expression of section (2) which has been interpreted as a prohibition of divorce and remarriage for church leaders may be illustrated by references to the early Pentecostals of the 20th century. Attention will be given to both groups in order.

The view that second marriages of any kind are prohibited for leadership aspirants was a widely held idea in the early church. Although second marriages were not forbidden for Christians whose spouses had predeceased them (see 1 Cor. 7:9,39), such marriages were seen as a concession to the flesh. Indeed, in the same letter to Timothy where Paul outlined the marriage standards for leaders, he also counseled “younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander” (1 Tim. 5:14). Bishops and elders were expected to live on a more dedicated level.

One of the earliest written references to remarriage and leadership occurs in *The Canons of the Holy and Altogether August Apostles*. Some commentators think that much of the content of these canons may have been written by the New Testament apostles and their immediate successors. The canons were collected and arranged early in the 4th century. A couple of the canons speak directly to the topic under discussion:

He who has been twice married after baptism, or who has had a concubine, cannot become a bishop, presbyter, or deacon . . . (Canon XVII).

He who married a widow, or a divorced woman, or an harlot, or a servant-maid, or an actress, cannot be a bishop, presbyter, or deacon . . . (Canon XVIII).<sup>17</sup>

Tertullian, the theologian of the 2nd century who is often quoted by Pentecostals on the topic of the Holy Spirit, had some significant comments to make about remarriage as well as the different roles of the laity and the clergy. He was very clear on the necessity of standards for leadership:

. . . among us the prescript is more fully and more carefully laid down, that they who are chosen into the [clergy] must be men of one marriage; which rule is so rigidly observed, that I remember some removed from their office for digamy.<sup>18</sup>

But Tertullian’s argument is not that there should be higher standards for priests than for the laity but that the laity should observe the same standards that are required for priests. In a pre-exposition of the “priesthood of all believers,” he makes the point that every believer acts as priest for himself:

Vain we be if we think that what is not lawful for priests is lawful for laics. Are we not all laics priests?' It is written: "A kingdom also, and priests to His God and Father, hath He made us". . . . where there is no joint session of the ecclesiastical Order, you offer, and baptize, and are priest, alone for yourself.<sup>19</sup>

He also discussed the possibility of situations where the laic would be called upon to take a leadership role in the absence of a priest and should therefore be living up to the standards of the priest:

But where three are, a church is, albeit they be laics. For each individual lives by his own faith, nor is there exception of persons with God . . . . Therefore if you have the right of a priest in your own person, in cases of necessity, it behooves you to likewise have the discipline of a priest whenever it may be necessary to have the right of a priest. If you are a digamist, do you baptize? If you are a digamist, do you offer? How much more a capital (a crime) be it for a digamist laic to act as a priest, when the priest himself, if he turn digamist, is deprived of the power of acting the priest! "But to necessity," you say, "indulgence is granted." No necessity is excusable which is avoidable. . . . unless the laics as well observe the rules which are to guide the choice of presbyters, how will there be presbyters at all, who are chosen to the office from among the laics? Hence we are bound to contend that the command to abstain from second marriages relates first to the laic.<sup>20</sup>

An important document of the mid-3rd to early-4th century known as the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* has a number of significant references to marriage. In Book Two, a section titled "What Ought to Be the Characters of a Bishop and the Rest of the Clergy," there are statements not only about the necessity of a single marriage but also about the marital record of his spouse:

Such a one a bishop ought to be, who has been the husband of one wife, who also has herself had no other husband.<sup>21</sup>

In another section of the "Constitutions," more details are given about their views on second marriages:

We have already said, that a bishop, a presbyter, and a deacon, when they are constituted, must be but once married, whether their wives be alive or whether they be dead; and that it is not lawful for them, if they are unmarried when they are ordained, to be married afterwards; or if they be then married, to marry a second time, but to be content with that wife, which they had when they came to ordination.<sup>22</sup>

The above, and other early church references, reveal the common understanding that candidates for church leadership were forbidden a second marriage. By the beginning of the middle

ages, at least in one branch of the church, prohibition had moved beyond the issue of a second marriage for a bishop to the position of celibacy for priests. The Roman Catholic Church still maintains that position. The question of the appropriateness of a second marriage for a surviving spouse virtually disappeared since Paul had clearly given permission for believers to remarry and since marriage for the “celibate” clergy was no longer a consideration.

While general references are not always applicable, it is fair to say that some protestant reformers introduced more permissive divorce and remarriage standards for both laity and clergy. In this context “successive polygamy” referred to the practice of remarrying after divorce and while the first spouse was still living. The Evangelical Branch of Protestantism, however, with a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, has endeavored to support marriage and resist societal pressures to liberalize divorce and remarriage – particularly for the clergy. There has been no opposition to a second marriage if the first spouse has died. But if the first marriage ended in divorce and the former spouse is still living, there has been great opposition to clergy remarriage. Most often the “husband of but one wife” passages in Timothy and Titus have been offered as the Biblical support for the prohibition.

Rejection of “successive polygamy” for a church leader who is divorced and remarried with the former spouse living was distinctly declared among most Pentecostals early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *Apostolic Faith*, a periodical published during the Azusa Street revival, devotes significant space to the views held at that time on the topic of marriage and divorce. The following is a summary of one of the articles:

1. “The forbidding to marry is the doctrine of devils. 1 Timothy 4:1-3 “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; . . . forbidding to marry.”
2. “God has approved of but one wife and one husband.” (Gen 2:24)
3. “The husband and wife are bound together for life.” (Rom 7:2)
4. “No court of man shall sever the marriage tie.” (Matt 19:6)
5. “Under Moses’ law they had been accustomed, for any uncleanness, adultery, fornication, or some cause not as much as that, to put away the wife by giving her a bill of divorcement, and she could go and be another man’s wife. But under the New Testament law, the law of Christ, she is bound by the law to her husband till death.”

6. "Jesus did away with the divorce law, and restored matrimony back to the Edenic standard. Under Moses' law, the sacredness of matrimony was lost through the hardness of hearts. But under the law of grace, it is restored back as in the beginning of grace. Praise God. God's promises are true and sure. Hallelujah Amen."
7. "Under the New Testament law, the law of Christ, there is but one cause for which a man may put away his wife, but no right to marry again. This cause is fornication or adultery." (Matt 5:31,32; Matt 19:9)
8. "After a man has lawfully put away his wife, or a wife has lawfully put away her husband, they are positively forbidden to marry again, under the New Testament law, until the former companion is dead." (Mark 10:11,12; Luke 16:18; Rom 7:2,3)
9. "If Jesus had intended that the innocent party should marry, He would have said so, and would not have said, Moses suffered it because of the hardness of your hearts. Jesus makes it very plain. If the innocent party marries, they are living in adultery. . . . There is one Scripture where many people are tied up, it is Matt. 19:9, where Jesus said, 'But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery, and whosoever marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery.' Now dear loved ones, let us stop and pray over this. 'Except it be for fornication and marrieth another.' Some think that this party would be entitled to marry again, but let us stop and see what Jesus is teaching here. If he puts away his wife except for the cause of fornication, he committeth a sin because he will cause her to commit adultery. Therefore he is bound by the law as long as she lives, bound right to the Edenic standard. Amen."
10. "Paul in 1 Tim.3:2 says, 'A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife. He also says, 1 Tim. 5:9, 'Let not the widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man.' This shows plainly that they recognized in the church that a man was to have one wife and a woman one husband."
11. "Dear beloved, you that have two wives or two husbands, before you had light on it [before conversion], you loved that way and had no condemnation. God did not condemn you until you received the light upon His Word on this subject; but now God holds you responsible for the light. If you continue in the old life after light has come upon you, then you will be in the sight of God an adulterer or an adulteress, and you are bound to lose your experience or substitute something in the place of what God has wrought. 'If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' Let us obey God's Word if it takes our right eye or right hand."

"So we find under the New Testament there is no putting away the first wife and getting another. Death is the only thing that severs the marriage tie. Rom. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:39."<sup>23</sup>

More specifically, for the purpose of this study, a later issue of the *Apostolic Faith* dealt with the issue of divorce and remarriage as it relates to ministers:

**“Do you have preachers and evangelists of the Apostolic Faith that have two wives or two husbands?”**

No, we did allow it before we became settled down and searched the Scriptures and compared scripture with scripture. We allowed those that were divorced and remarried to preach the Gospel, thinking that everything was under the Blood, we found it was wrong; that the widow was to be the wife of one man and the bishop was to be the husband of one wife. We found no scripture where the preacher could be engaged in the blessed Gospel ministry with two living companions.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that a popular argument, that “God has granted forgiveness for all sins including divorce prior to conversion, and therefore everyone gets a fresh start,” was also a common argument at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – “everything was under the Blood.” But Seymour declares that they had made a mistake in allowing divorced and remarried people to participate in ministry and found it necessary to reverse their position when they “settled down and searched the Scriptures.”<sup>25</sup>

*Unfaithfulness in the Current Marriage.* The fourth major interpretation of the “husband of but one wife” qualification shifts the focus from marital status or marital record to the quality of a person’s commitment to a current spouse. In other words, it is argued that Paul is not talking about a church leader’s right to remarry after the death of a former spouse or after a divorce with the former spouse still living, rather he is insisting that to qualify as an overseer, elder, or a deacon, the person must be “a one-woman man” – *faithful to the current spouse*. Commentators, both old and new, have been divided as to the interpretation of this phrase. Similarly, the different versions of the Scriptures reveal a bias when translating the reverse “one-man woman” reference to the widows who qualify for social assistance (or who qualify for the list of deaconesses) mentioned in 1 Tim 5:9. *The King James Version* represents the view that one-marriage status is the qualification whereas the *New International Version* clearly emphasizes the aspect of faithfulness in marriage (in a note, the NIV offers the alternate interpretation, “has had but one husband”). Curiously, the NIV translators did not apply the “faithfulness” theme in the translation of the verses referring to overseer, elders, and deacons in 1 Tim. 3:2,12 and Titus 1:6.

*King James Version* – “having been the wife of one man”

*Revised Standard Version* – “has been married more than once”

*New English Bible* – “must have been faithful in marriage to one man”

*New International Version* – “has been faithful to her husband”

Again, without going into great detail, the grammatical arguments to interpret the “husband of but one wife” (*μιας γυναικος ανδρα* – *mias gunaikos andra*) as a qualitative reference to the nature of the person rather than a statement of marital status may be summarized as follows:

- ▶ the word for woman (*gunaikos*) is in the genitive form, which indicates that it is being used as an adjective to describe another noun
- ▶ the word for man (*andra*) is the noun being described in the expression and appears in the accusative form, which indicates that it is the predicate of the sentence
- ▶ the phrase is “anarthrous” – that is, the absence of an article may support the emphasis on quality of character
- ▶ given the order and grammatical cases of the words, the expression would most naturally be translated as “a one-woman man”

Defenders of this interpretation conclude that a person may be divorced and married and still be eligible to be an overseer, elder, or deacon as long as the person is perceived to be faithful to the current spouse.

With the evangelical world so fractured on the possible interpretations of the “husband of but one wife” expression, it may be inappropriate to take a definitive stance on the subject of divorce and remarriage with reference to church leaders *solely* on the qualification list set forth by the apostle Paul.

## **C. THE ROLE OF LEADERS**

### **Bishops, Elders, and Shepherds**

On two occasions in the New Testament the titles elders, overseers, and shepherd are used in the same passage and appear to refer to the same persons:

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the *elders* of the church. . . .

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*. Be *shepherds* of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood (Acts 20:17,28).

1 To the *elders* among you, I appeal as a *fellow elder*, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

2 Be *shepherds* of God's flock that is under your care, serving as *overseers*--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being *examples to the flock*.

4 And when the *Chief Shepherd* appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Emphasis is placed on the responsibility that is assigned to church leaders such as overseers to “keep watch” (Acts 20:28) or elders to “direct the affairs of the church” (1 Tim 5:17) or shepherds to lead the flock “that is under your care” (1 Pet. 5:2). All of these activities should be performed by leadership without “lording it over those entrusted to you” (1 Pet. 5:3). But the key instruction is relates to the shepherd “being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:4).

### **Shepherd Examples**

The “above approach” reputation is absolutely essential in order for leadership to function as effective examples. The metaphors of *shepherds* and *God’s flock* are very helpful in communicating the fundamental role of leaders as examples. When Paul was speaking directly to the elders of the Ephesian church, he pleads with them to be good shepherds: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the *flock* of which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*. Be *shepherds* of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Shepherds are most effective, or course, when they reflect the sacrificial love which reflects the compassion of the Chief Shepherd.<sup>26</sup>

Paul warned the Ephesian leaders that “savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (v.29). It appears that Paul had reasons for his concerns – his letter to Timothy, who was in Ephesus at the time, offers guidance in dealing with those who prey on God’s people with their “controversies” (1 Tim 1:4) and “meaningless talk” (v.6). Paul notes they want to be teachers “but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (v.7). It is quite significant that with the confusion which seemed to exist in the Ephesian church that Paul would provides Timothy with a list of qualifications for those who would offer valid leadership in the church at Ephesus. Marriage and the family are priority items on the list. God’s leaders must be seen to be models in faith and practice.

### **Deacons**

One of the central tenets of Christianity is love. Jesus claimed that if a person were to love God and one’s neighbor as oneself, then the principles of the law would be satisfied. The moral necessity of taking care of the less fortunate can never be separated from a true understanding of Christianity. Greek words which proved useful to the Christian church as it was set in order to fulfill its mandate in a needy world were *diakoneō* (the action of performing service), *diakonia* (the service performed), and *diakonos* (the person performing service).



There are a number of New Testament references which illustrate the use of these words in reference to service, and particularly service to the poor and needy:

*diakoneō*

**Matt. 25:44** – “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you (*diakoneō*)?”

**Rom. 15:25,26,31** – I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service (*diakoneō*) of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. . . . Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service (*diakonia*) in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there.

*diakonia*

**Acts 11:29** – The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help (*diakonia*) for the brothers living in Judea.

**Acts 12:25** – When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission (*diakonia*), they returned from Jerusalem . . .

*diakonos* (plural *diakonoi*)

**John 2:5** – His mother said to the *servants* (*diakonoi*) . . . (also v.9; see Matt. 22:13 where *diakonoi* is translated *attendants* in the NIV).

**Rom. 15:8** – For I tell you that Christ has become a servant (*diakonos*) of the Jews on behalf of God's truth . . .

**Rom. 16:1** – I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea . . .

**1 Cor. 3:5** – What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants (*diakonoi*), through whom you came to believe . . .

**2 Cor. 6:4** – . . . as servants (*diakonoi*) of God we commend ourselves in every way

**Col. 1:7** – You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister (*diakonos*) of Christ on our behalf . . .

The origin of *deacon* as an office in the local church may be traced to the occasion when the “Seven” in Acts 6 were chosen by the believers to perform some service functions in the church in Jerusalem. Although two of the first groups, Stephen and Philip, personally had public ministry gifts such as evangelism, preaching, and miracles following, the specific task they were selected for was the administration of Christian charity. Nowhere in the Acts passage were they called deacons but the noun for the work they accomplished is *diakonia* and the verb for the service they performed is *diakoneō*:

. . . the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (*diakonia*).

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait (*diakoneō*) on tables” (Acts 6:1,2).

Within three decades of the beginning of the church in Jerusalem, the office of deacon was a recognized position in other churches. We know from the reference in Acts 14:23 that it was the custom of the apostle Paul to set in order new churches. There are references to deacons in at least two churches – Philippi and Ephesus. In his first letter to Timothy, whom Paul had left in Ephesus to take care of the church, the apostle listed qualifications for the office of deacon and declared that candidates must be tested for the position.

Deacons, like overseers, are to be “the husband of but one wife,” good managers of their families, sincere, temperate, and honest. They must have “a clear conscience” in their claim to be holders of “the truths of the faith” (1 Tim. 3:8 - 12). In a Pentecostal context, it would be important for deacons to hold the distinctive doctrines of the faith as understood by the Fellowship. As official leadership representatives of the message, values, and standards of the local church, they must be “worthy of respect.” Their lives should be exemplary.

Anything that hinders a leader from being a good model not only neutralizes the effectiveness of the leader but may in fact produce a negative impact on the flock. It is easier to discuss the questions related to a difficult topic than to press through to an answer. To take a “do as I do” position certainly demands the courage and grace which only God can provide. And yet being an example, allows for no other path. In times when the culture of the world practices a model of marriage which is broken, there is a great opportunity for the leader/servants of the local church leadership to model God’s intention for marriage and the family.

The church, and especially its leaders, must understand that it is always called upon to sacrifice personal rights or privileges for the welfare of those who are in need – such as those who have not heard the gospel, the poor, and the children.

### ***Summary***

Our study of the Scriptures and our desire to apply effectively God’s principles in our contemporary context points to several important considerations:

1. The unique importance of marriage as a fundamental building block of society is established by God in the creation account of the human race. Its permanence provides the ideal means for carrying out the instructions to “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen.1:28). Marriage is the human covenant relationship which pictures God’s bond with Israel and Christ’s union with His bride, the church. The breakdown of God’s ideal for marriage and the family is one

of the most serious moral issues facing the church and society in general.

2. In the plan of redemption, God chooses individuals who please Him and who qualify for leadership tasks by observing the standards he establishes for all people. There is not a double standard of morality, but eligibility for leadership requires the candidates to measure up to Christian criteria in God's eyes and in the estimation of the church and the world.

While there is not agreement in evangelical circles as to the interpretation of the "husband of but one wife" qualification and its precise application for the contemporary church, there is not sufficient clarity or authority to amend the traditional understanding that leaders should not remarry with a former spouse still living.

3. One of the basic responsibilities of leaders is to provide an example in their own lifestyles of God's will for His people (1 Peter 5:1-3). The most powerful witness is both word and deed. In a time when the culture of the world presents a direct challenge to God's intention for marriage and the family, it is the privilege of the church and particularly its leaders to give a clear response.
4. The church should engage in pro-active ministries to prepare members and adherents for marriage as well as providing spiritual support for families.

### ***Recommendations***

In the light of the Biblical emphasis on marriage as a fundamental building block of society, on the maintenance of high standards for leadership, and on the powerful role of the shepherd of the flock providing a clear model of Christian marriage, we recommend there be no change in the PAOC qualification for credentials with reference to marital status.

In the interests of consistency, we recommend that a PAOC credential holder invite individuals into the pulpit of the local church or as participants in ministerial events those individuals who also model the same high view of Christian marriage.

With reference to membership on local church boards, we recommend that individuals be chosen who have the qualities listed in the Scriptures. We understand that the autonomous local church has in the past found it necessary to make exceptions with reference to some qualifications. Given the unique composition of some congregations, particularly with reference to the marital status, of a significant proportion of its membership, we understand that the local church may amend

the qualifications for board members according to its own needs and judgment.

From a legal point of view we caution any decision-making body, whether it be a PAOC credential committee or a local church nominating committee, concerning decisions about the eligibility of an individual based on the alleged conduct of his or her spouse and also the alleged spiritual status of the individual at any point of time in his or her life, including pre and post-conversion.

## Endnotes

1. The nine passages usually discussed in relation to the issue are Gen.2:24; Deut. 24:1-4; Mal. 2:6-16; Matt. 5:31-32; Matt. 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:1-6; and 1 Cor. 7:10-15.
2. The committee which studied the issue and prepared the amendments for the Conference delegates also carefully studied the desertion issue of 1 Cor. 7:15 "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances. The committee concluded that the statement that the believer is not bound when an unbeliever leaves the marriage does not mean that the believer is free to marry someone else: the is not bound appears to be a release from the exhortations to a believer in the previous verses to maintain a sanctifying influence on an unbelieving spouse.
3. Matt. 19:9 " . . . anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." The subject of the sentence is anyone with three singular verbs, divorces, marries, and commits adultery; the singular subject is a person who has engaged in all three actions without the one acceptable cause for doing so except for marital unfaithfulness.
4. The Bill of Divorce employed by the Jews during the time of Jesus life on earth specifically guarantees the right to remarry.
5. Wherever italics occur in Bible quotations in the paper, they have been added for emphasis on the related point.
6. In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul felt it was necessary to distinguish between teaching on marriage which had been handed down from the Lord and additional teachings which he offered personally as the Spirit directed him (1 Cor. 7:7,10,40). The significant qualifications for Christian leadership which Paul listed in his first letter to Timothy and also in the letter to Titus contain material that was not discussed by the Lord when He was on earth.
7. See 1 Timothy 3:4,5,12 and Titus 1:6.
8. Lisa Gabnardi and Lee A. Rosen, *Intimate Relationships: College Students from Divorced and Intact Families in Divorce and the Next Generation: Effects on Young Adults Patterns of Intimacy and Expectations in Marriage*, ed. by Craig A. Everett (New York: The Hawarth Press, Inc., 1992), 34.
9. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America* (June 1999). The National Marriage Project is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, interdisciplinary initiative located at Rutgers, the state university of New Jersey, and administered through the Rutgers Foundation and the Center for Social Research and Instruction.
10. Ibid., 50.
11. Ibid., 47.
12. Whitehead, 71.
13. Richard Weymouth, ed., *The Modern Speech New Testament*.
14. Craig S. Keener quotes ancient sources to show that even in secular politics it was a philosophical commonplace that those with political power ought to be morally superior for the sake of example, so that those seeking offices might be tested by lists of moral qualifications. . . . *And Marries Another* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 86.
15. Jerome (A.D. 345 - 419) claimed that overseers and elders were originally the same with the titles being used interchangeably; W. A. Jurgens, ed. and trans., *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 3 vols. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 2:195).
16. It must be noted that we do not claim any special divine direction for the early church fathers on some issues we find ourselves in sharp disagreement with the fathers.

17. The Canons of the Holy and Altogether August Fathers, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Vol. XIV, 595.
18. Tertullian, On Exhortation to Chastity, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IV, 7:54. Digamy is the practice of marrying a second time after the death or divorce of the first spouse.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, 2:2.
22. Ibid., 17:456.
23. *Apostolic Faith*, September 1907, 3; and January 1907, 3.
24. *Apostolic Faith*, October to January 1908, 2.
25. As with the reference to the Early Church Fathers, so with reference to the Pentecostals of the early 20th century, no claim of infallibility is made for them. Some early Pentecostals advanced views on a variety of topics which are not acceptable today.
26. See 1 Peter 2:25; Heb. 13:20; Rev. 7:17.