

WAS THE APOSTLE PAUL MARRIED?

By Brother Mike Sutherland

Was the Apostle Paul never married, once married, twice married, divorced, or widowed? The Bible does not specifically state one way or the other as to what his marital history was. From what we know of Jewish custom and Jewish law, it is our strong belief that at some time in Paul's life he must have been married at least once. We base that conclusion in part upon an article in the Jewish Encyclopedia. Later on, we will quote from that article and a few other sources. We start this discussion by reading several passages of Scripture including *Genesis 1:27–28*, *Genesis 2:24*, *Malachi 2:14-16*, *Matthew 19:3-12*, *Matthew 19:27-30*, *Mark 10:7–9*, *1 Corinthians 7:1-9*, *Ephesians 5:29–32*, *1 Timothy 3:2*, *1 Timothy 3:12*, and *Titus 1:6*:

²⁷ So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. ²⁸ And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. *Genesis 1:27–28*

²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. *Genesis 2:24*

¹⁴ Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. ¹⁵ And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. *Malachi 2:14-16*

³ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? ⁴ And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ **And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?** ⁶ Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. ⁷ They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? ⁸ He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. ¹⁰ **His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.** ¹¹ **But he said unto them,**

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All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. ¹²For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. *Matthew 19:3-12*

²⁷ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ **And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.** ³⁰ But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first. *Matthew 19:27-30*

⁷ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; ⁸ And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. *Mark 10:7-9*

¹ Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. ² Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. ³ Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. ⁴ The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. ⁵ Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. ⁶ **But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.** ⁷ **For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.** ⁸ I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. ⁹ But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. *1 Corinthians 7:1-9*

²⁹ For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: ³⁰ For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. ³¹ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³² This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. *Ephesians 5:29-32*

² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; *1 Timothy 3:2*

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¹² Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. *1 Timothy 3:12*

⁶ If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. *Titus 1:6*

Was Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ qualified to pastor churches? How should, and how does, Paul's marital status affect the interpretation of *1 Timothy 3:2*? While we do not believe the marital status of Paul makes one bit of difference as to how *1 Timothy 3:2* **should** be interpreted, we realize that because of the way many fundamentalists and Baptists interpret the phrase "husband of one wife" from *1 Timothy 3:2* that it is an issue that must be dealt with if for no other reason than building a foundation to destroy the heresy that says that a divorced man is permanently disqualified from entering the ministry.

Reading "divorced" and "double married" into *1 Timothy 3:2* is the seed bed of much endless speculation and confusion in the interpretation of the standards for church office. Here, we will do some "speculation". If the same hermeneutical standard that is applied to the interpretation of the phrase "husband of one wife" by those who advocate "one living wife for one lifetime" is applied to the rest of the standards listed in *1 Timothy 3*, then we have ourselves a huge doctrinal mess that butchers the English language leaving no one qualified for church office. Not only does it butcher the English language, it breaks the rules of English grammar in an in your face manner. If many so-called conservative commentators and preachers would just interpret *1 Timothy 3:2* in the normal, literal, grammatical sense, we would not have all the hurt and confusion caused by their breaking every hermeneutical standard for interpreting the English Bible. But the "once married" stallions with their blinders on can only see the "once married" preachers that are dead ahead. The rest of the standards in the passage are but hurdles they must jump to get past those "double married" preachers. They cannot interpret properly in context because their doctrinal blinders will not let them see the plain English that is on all sides of them. "Must be" is a present tense phrase. "Must be" is a present tense phrase. For the third time, "must be" is a present tense phrase. Furthermore, all of the standards for church service in *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1* are given in the present tense. In other words they are looking at present conduct: at the present qualifications for the man being considered for the office of bishop or deacon. For you Greek scholars, you will smother to death if your breath of life is one of the Greek words for divorce (apostasion and apoluo) because they are found no where in the context of *1 Timothy 3:2* or *Titus 1:6*. Do you think that the Holy Ghost did not know what the Greek word for divorce was? He used them in *Matthew 5:31-32*, *Matthew 19:7*, and *Mark 10:4*. If the Greek words for divorce were in *1 Timothy 3:2* do you not think the King James translators would have supplied it as they did in *Matthew 5:31-32*, *Matthew 19:7*, and *Mark 10:4*.

What about the phrase "must be...husband of one wife" used in *1 Timothy 3:2*? Remember, we are "speculating" here just as those who speculate that Paul meant divorced in this passage. The big difference is that our "speculation" has much support from the context, both doctrinal and historical as we will prove in the following pages. If we assume that Paul was a virgin, a widower, or divorced, then what the Holy Ghost said about "the husband of one wife" in *1 Timothy 3:2* does not make

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sense if we apply it in an absolute sense to Paul since Paul had to be put into a position where he temporarily assumed the role of a pastor in the churches he established on the mission field. If being the husband of one wife was a “must be” qualification for a church leader, then Paul was not “qualified” to pastor the churches he started on the mission field. If your doctrine interprets “husband of one wife” as “not ever having been divorced”, then if Paul was divorced, then he was not qualified to temporarily assume the position of pastor in the churches he established on the mission field. The Scriptures do not specifically state that Paul was not a widower or was not divorced. However, the Bible does plainly state that Paul was unmarried. That the term “unmarried” applies to both virgins and the divorced is proven in *1 Corinthians 7:11* which reads:

¹¹ But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. *1 Corinthians 7:11*

So, was Paul’s state of being unmarried that of being widowed, or divorced, or virgin. We believe that Paul was married at one time. Are we to assume that since the only apostle who was identified as having a wife was Peter that none of the others were married? That is highly unlikely since it was an affront and even unlawful in most instances for Jewish men not to be married. That some of the other apostles were married in addition to Peter is indicated in *1 Corinthians 9:5* which states:

⁵ Have we not power to lead about a sister, **a wife, as well as other apostles**, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? *1 Corinthians 9:5*

Note that the word “apostles” is plural. The point being that though there were other apostles who were married, their marital status is not specifically identified in the Scriptures. This passage of Scripture also puts the Roman Catholic doctrine of celibacy back into the theological crypt that it came slithering forth from. There is also proof from *Matthew 19:27-29* that some of the apostles had forsaken their wives and yet the continued in the ministry. These verses state:

²⁷ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, **or wife**, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. *Matthew 19:27-29*

Note that the Holy Ghost is quoting the Lord Jesus Christ as having said that those who had forsaken their wives for his name sake would receive an hundredfold and eternal life. Yet all the apostles continued in the ministry until well after the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are they that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. Now what of the possible marital status of the apostle Paul. Let’s look at some documents to ascertain whether Paul could have been married. Note the following quotes:

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*The first positive commandment of the Bible, according to rabbinic interpretation (Maimonides, "Minyan ha-Miz.vot," 212), is that concerning the propagation of the human species (Gen. I. 28). It is thus considered the duty of every Israelite to marry as early in life as possible. Eighteen years is the age set by the Rabbis (Ab. v. 24); and any one remaining unmarried after his twentieth year is said to be cursed by God Himself (K.id. 29b). Some urge that children should marry as soon as they reach the age of puberty, i.e., the fourteenth year (Sanh. 76b); and R. H.isda attributed his mental superiority to the fact that he was married when he was but sixteen years old (K.id. l.c.). It was, however, strictly forbidden for parents to give their children in marriage before they had reached the age of puberty (Sanh. 76b). **A man who, without any reason, refused to marry after he had passed his twentieth year was frequently compelled to do so by the court.** To be occupied with the study of the Torah was regarded as a plausible reason for delaying marriage; but only in very rare instances was a man permitted to remain in celibacy all his life (Yeb. 63b; Maimonides, "Yad," Ishut, xv. 2, 3; Shulh.an 'Aruk, Eben ha-'Ezer, 1, 1-4; see Celibacy)....*

The duty of marriage is discharged after the birth of a son and a daughter (Yeb. 61a). Still no man may live without a wife even after he has many children (ib.). Women are exempted from the duty of marriage, although, to avoid suspicion, they are advised not to remain single (ib. 65b; "Yad," l.c. 2, 16; ib. Issure Biah, xxi. 26; Eben ha-'Ezer, 1, 13; see Woman).

(Cited from the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia article "Marriage Laws" located at:

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10435-marriage-laws>)

*We should not appoint to a Sanhedrin a man of very old age or one who does not possess male physical attributes, for they possess the trait of cruelty, **nor a man who is childless**, so that the judges should be merciful. [Cited from: Halacha 3: Sanhedrin veba`Onashin haMesurin lahem, Mishneh Torah]*

There were ten basic qualifications for the eligibility of membership. Each member of the Sanhedrin must be a Hebrew, learned in the law, and possessing judicial experience at lower levels (there were minor Sanhedrins of twenty-three members which tried non-capital offenses in every town of 120 males or more). The member was required also to be learned in science, a linguist, modest, pious but strong and courageous, devoid of physical defects, a qualified tradesman, and, finally, he was required to be married and to be a father. [Liberty In The Balance, Russell and Colin Standish, Hartland Publishing, August 30, 1998]

If Paul was never married, he was in a very difficult position in a Jewish culture that would force a man to get married by court order if he had not married before the age of 20. It must also be noted

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that the Talmud specifically stated: “Any Jew who has not a wife is no man” [Babylonian Talmud, Yebamoth 63a]. There is also a very strong possibility that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin because he **consented** unto the stoning death of Stephen (*Acts 7:58-8:1*). Only the Sanhedrin could authorize the death penalty for religious offenses; in this case, the false accusation of blasphemy. We have already proven that members of the Sanhedrin had to be married. Many **ASSUME** that Paul was never married because he says in *1 Corinthians 7:8* that he is unmarried. We have already proven in the chapter “Adultery, Fornication, Desertion, Divorce And Remarriage” that the term unmarried applies to widows/widowers, virgins, and those who are divorced. It is no more a stretch for us to believe that Paul was once married, but now unmarried through divorce or death, than it is for you to believe that he was never married because he is unmarried. It could well be that Paul was one of the men that was made a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven’s sake (*Matthew 19:12*) or one of those who had forsaken their wives for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (*Matthew 19:29*). In closing this topic, we go back to the statement that we introduced this topic with. How should, and how does, Paul’s marital status affect the interpretation of *1 Timothy 3:2*? We do not believe the marital status of Paul makes one bit of difference as to how *1 Timothy 3:2* **should** be interpreted, but it must be dealt with because of the way some preachers and pastors interpret the phrase “husband of one wife”. Furthermore, if we take the interpretation by some preachers and pastors of the phrase “husband of one wife” to its logical conclusion, then Paul could not be a missionary or pastor because he was not the husband of one wife, the Lord Jesus Christ could not be the pastor of His church because He was not the husband of one wife, and neither could God of the Old Testament qualify because He was divorced and unmarried and therefore not the husband of one wife.

After having stated that it is better for those that are entering into the ministry to be unmarried, Paul says that he speaks what he speaks by the permission of the Holy Ghost and not by commandment of the Holy Ghost. Paul’s statement agrees with the statement that the Lord Jesus Christ made in *Matthew 19:12* for those who had made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. The Lord Jesus Christ also said by implication in *Matthew 19:12* that some men would not be able to receive his statement about becoming eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. That is why Paul’s statement in *1 Corinthians 7:6* emphasizes that it is not a commandment, but a statement that is given by permission of the Holy Ghost. Celibacy is a gift and not a commandment for those who would be minister’s of the gospel contrary to what the Catholics teach concerning the heresy of mandatory “celibate” priests and nuns. The celibacy spoken to by the Lord Jesus Christ is a celibacy grounded in the control of the fleshly desires through God the Holy Ghost and does not involve the physical mutilation of the body via castration. It is a celibacy that is a spiritual gift of God. What is the greater celibacy: that which is brought about through mutilation of the body (a carnal work of the flesh), or that which is brought about by God the Holy Ghost giving you victory over your flesh? Paul’s statement concerning celibacy must also be interpreted in the context of his ministry. Paul’s missionary ministry required much travel and much peril which would have been much more complex and stressful had he had the responsibility of carrying a wife and children along. If Paul had a wife and children, they would have been subjected to the same perils and stresses which he experienced. All that said, we do not know whether Paul was a widower or a divorced man. Because of Jewish law, it would have been almost impossible for Paul to have been a lifelong single man

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since Jewish law prohibited such practice because of God's commandment to go forth and replenish the earth. We know from Jewish law that a man could be taken to court and compelled to get married if he was unmarried and over twenty years old. Since Paul was unmarried, he could have either never been married (highly unlikely), widowed, or divorced. All three meet the condition of being unmarried. If I am divorced, I can legitimately make the statement that I am unmarried. If I am divorced, I no longer have a wife. If I remarry after a divorce, then the only wife I have is my current wife. The proof of that is in the statement that the Lord Jesus Christ made in *John 4:17-18* which reads:

¹⁷ The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: ¹⁸ For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. *John 4:17-18*

Note that the Lord Jesus Christ said that the woman “**hast had five husbands**” . That is in the past tense and means that those men were no longer considered by the Lord Jesus Christ to legally be her husbands. Its application in the discussion before us is that if a man is divorced and not remarried, then he is no longer considered to have a wife. Another consideration here is that the Biblical laws and the Jewish secular laws governing marriage were not binding upon Gentiles. The marriages of Gentiles were regulated by the laws of the governments they were subject to. That changes when an individual gets saved because they then come under the laws of the Bible. The Bible says that the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God.

Since Paul, with the permission of the Holy Ghost, recommended that all men called to the missionary ministry stay unmarried, then why did Paul state in *1 Timothy 3:2*, *1 Timothy 3:12*, and *Titus 1:6* that being the “husband of one wife” was a qualification for being a bishop? Paul was sometimes put into a dual role of having to be both a missionary and a temporary acting pastor. As a missionary, it was better if he remained unmarried, but as an overseer (bishop) it was alright for a man to have a wife. Many fundamentalists scream for a literal interpretation of the scriptures until they get to the qualifications for bishops, elders, and deacons in the Pastoral Epistles. How you interpret these passages depends upon what exactly does “husband of one wife” mean. What many fundamentalists do is to read the phrase “husband of one wife” as “husband of one **and only one** wife” just as the Roman Catholics do when they state in their perverted Bible in *1 Timothy 3:2* that a bishop must be “married only once”. If you are a fundamentalist and add the phrase “and only one”, then you are adding to the Word of God. Some substitute the phrase “double married” for “husband of one wife”. Some even substitute the phrase “not having been divorced” for the phrase “husband of one wife”. The words “divorced” or “remarried” do not occur anywhere in the context of these passages. The Roman Catholic phrase “married only once” cannot be supported from any PURE Greek text in existence. Let us dig a little deeper.

What the phrase “husband of one wife” means in its strictest literal sense is that if you are not a husband (of one wife), then you are not qualified to be a bishop, an elder, or a deacon. Another literal interpretation of it is, that if you are a single man who has never been married, then you are not qualified. As a reminder to those reading or listening, a virgin man could not be a Levitical priest. Yet another literal interpretation of it is that if you are an unmarried widower, then you are not

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qualified because you are no longer a husband (of one wife) since death legally and scripturally dissolved the marriage and you no longer have a wife. If you do not believe that death and divorce dissolves a marriage, then a remarried widower is the husband of more than one wife and a remarried divorced man is the husband of more than one wife and neither is qualified to be a bishop. Most fundamentalists scream that you are perverse when you state that a sexual relationship constitutes a marriage in God's eyes, but their doctrine does not line up with what the Bible says in *1 Corinthians 6:15-16*:

¹⁵ Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. ¹⁶ What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. *1 Corinthians 6:15-16*

1 Corinthians 6:15-16 quotes *Genesis 2:24* as does *Matthew 19:5-6*. Marriage is a physical relationship that binds upon those who participate in it a lifelong spiritual and emotional covenant. Just because people refuse to participate in a man made legal ceremony, or to get a piece of paper, does not make that physical marriage any less binding in the eyes of God. The reason that many fundamentalists scream against a sexual relationship constituting a marriage is that many fundamentalist preachers and pastors have been guilty of falsely called "premarital sex" which if they believe their "husband of one and only one wife" doctrine, then out of their own mouths it disqualifies them from the ministry. Preacher man, if you have had so-called premarital sex with a women and you will not, or did not, commit to a lifetime with her, then you have made her an harlot. Furthermore, if you are now with another woman, then you are guilty of being double married by your own standards. That is the unforgivable sin in the Independent Baptist movement and that puts you out of the ministry. Yet, many fundamentalists will leave a serial adulterer and fornicator in the ministry just so that do not have a divorce decree and/or second marriage certificate in their hands. You may scream that my interpretation of marriage is perverse, but read your Bible and weep for all the misery you and your doctrine have caused divorced men whom you put out of the ministry and forsake your hypocrisy.

What I have done here is to point out some of the extreme interpretations that result from reading our private interpretation, our own doctrine, if you will, into the Scriptures. Most Bible rejecting fundamentalists will not even read what I have written concerning marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the qualifications for church office because they are strutting peacocks which stand by themselves and say, "come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (*Isaiah 65:5*).