

Should Unmarried Men Serve As Church Leaders?

Should unmarried men, men who have never been married, serve as church leaders. What does the Bible say?

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

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

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

Notice the use of the phrase 'the husband of one wife'. Would the husband of zero wives qualify? Let's see...

What could be wrong with a single man being a church leader?

1. A single man will not have the experience of ruling his children.

Is this important? Does it not teach a man the importance of patience and unconditional love? What other lessons is raising a family apt to teach a man? The value of discipline and how to properly apply it? The value of servanthood? The value of being a good example to young impressionable minds that are constantly watching him and striving to emulate him and gain his approval?

2. A single man will not have a wife to challenge him to forsake his own selfish interests, daily, for the interests of another.

Does it not teach a man the depth of the meaning of self-sacrificial love to live at peace and harmony with someone - to have a wife whom he must give of himself to and whose human weaknesses he must cope with and minister to on a daily basis?

3. A single man will not necessarily have proved himself truly committed to a group of people.

A husband has a proving ground... his family provides him with many opportunities to show his level of commitment to those whose welfare he is responsible for in a way that no other relationship could show - day in and day out, though thick and thin, better and worse, good times and bad times. A single man has not yet had a chance to prove himself in certain important areas: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" [2 Tim 3:4]. If he has not yet had a chance to prove himself, then he should still be considered a novice: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." [2 Tim 3:6].

4. A man's choice of a mate can be a reflection of his own character.

If a man is already married, the existing elders can evaluate his wife, to see what kind of a wife this man has chosen for himself. Also, the elders can

evaluate the wife to see if she meets the scriptural requirements of 1 Timothy 3:11: “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things”. If a single man is appointed deacon or elder and then marries a woman who is a slanderer, what then? Ask the man to step down, obviously, but indeed that would be an awkward situation for both the man and the other church leaders. A man’s choice of a slanderous wife would show that there may have been a problem with his ability to judge character or a problem with his own character for not desiring to find a godly wife.

5. A single man lacks some vital experience.

Many of the most critical and common issues facing members of churches have to do with marriage, husband-wife relationships, and child-rearing. Can a single man speak from experience on any of these sensitive and vitally important issues? Only to a limited degree – based on what he observed of his parents and other married couples. That is a far cry from actually being an active participant in a marriage relationship. I would never want to ride in a plane where the pilot’s only flying experience consisted of observing other pilots fly planes. This lack of experience of a church leader could be a stumbling block to others in the church – it could cause couples in the church to be reluctant to seek counsel from a man who was never married and who never experienced any of the problems that they are going through.

6. A single man may be preoccupied with seeking a mate.

While it can be said that a married man can be preoccupied with his family, it can also be said that a single man may be preoccupied with finding a wife or preoccupied with his loneliness.

Objections Answered

1. Paul was not married, yet he certainly had authority in the church.

Paul was an apostle. There are no more apostles nowadays. Furthermore, God appointed Paul (1 Tim 1:1). He was not appointed by a local body of believers. Also, God taught Paul through direct revelation (Galatians 1:1) – so Paul did not need the experience of raising a family.

2. Jesus was not married.

If there was anybody who would set the right example for us in the area of church leaders, it would surely be Him. Jesus is a special case. If every Christian was God incarnate, they would, I am sure, qualify for church leadership.

3. The conclusion that an elder must not be a single man are merely speculation and conjecture.

We can see this is not merely speculation simply by reading 1 Timothy chapter

3. You can't reliably determine if a man is able to rule his household if he doesn't have a household to rule. Scripture says we are to pick a man based on specific experience he has - that he has proven himself qualified by having properly raised his family. That is the scriptural litmus test, like it or not. It could have said he must be good at running a business or good at debating theology but it says "if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?"

4. It could easily be argued that the phrase "husband of one wife" was intended to mean "not a polygamist."

If the idea intended by the Spirit here in this passage (1 Tim 3:2) were strictly that a man must be married to be an overseer in the church, why wasn't the phrase worded more to that effect, e.g., "he must be married"? It does not have to be worded "he must be married" because it is obvious that he must be married if he is to have his children in subjection with all gravity (1 Tim 3:4) unless it is ok for an elder to have illegitimate children.

5. Didn't Paul imply that single men can serve as leaders in 1 Corinthians 7:

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord; how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world; how he may please his wife....And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction" (1 Cor. 7:29-33, 35).

Paul is not referring to experience here nor is he giving qualifications for elders here. He is simply encouraging believers to live for the Lord and giving advice to/for singles who, like many of the singles around us today, think that by finding a spouse, life will instantly be transformed into heaven on earth.

6. There are many issues that do not pertain to marriage that church leaders have to deal with.

Is it wise to make familiarity with marital issues the chief criterion by which you determine whether a person should be an elder or not? Familiarity with marital issues is God's criteria, not merely this author's criteria, as specified in 1 Timothy 3:4-5. If the family unit is a shambles, the church will be a shambles. The sins (bad examples, etc.) of the parents do indeed filter down to many generations and effect other members of the body of Christ. Anyone who does not appreciate the importance of knowing how to biblically counsel people's family problems and who has no experience in this area, is somebody that is not yet prepared to oversee the family of God. Also, there are times

when a woman needs to be counseled or both a husband and a wife need to be counseled, and in those kinds of situations it would be extremely advantageous for a married church leader to have his wife present to assist with the counseling.