

Russell Kelfer

A One-Woman Man

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Series: I Timothy

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Studying tough Scriptures is sometimes a test
And we long for our tired brains to have a rest,
Only to find, sadly enough,
The next thing we come to is equally tough.

But that's why we're here, and in spite of our fears,
We must not flee when the tough stuff appears.
We must be willing, if to growth we aspire,
To jump out of the frying pan, into the fire!

Out of the frying pan...into the fire. That description never fit a series of studies more than this one. Fresh from a look at the two-fold role of woman, on into the landmined arena where we explored the difference between men and women and the limitations and priorities God gave to woman. We moved into the general topic of blamelessness and the kind of man God is looking for: God is looking for *a few good men*. His eyes are searching to and fro throughout the whole world looking for a man whose heart is faithful to Him.

Now we begin a step-by-step look at the specific qualities those few good men must have. Paul is taking resumes, he is accepting job applications and he is outlining, beforehand, the requirements for the job. Ladies, here's your chance. If you've been waiting to see *him squirm*, wait no longer. Because the first qualification God requires of Christian leaders has to do with how he loves and treats his wife. It has to do with a quality of behavior, but it goes beyond that; it has to do with his singleness of heart that so gives self to another in love that *never at any time does it consider* relinquishing his commitment to that one he has pledged his life to. God is looking for a man who is so spiritually committed to Christ that he will be His *no matter what Satan throws at him*, and His external measuring stick is how he treats the woman in his life...no matter what.

We are, you recall, in I Timothy, chapter three, where Paul began his transition from what God is looking for in a woman to

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what God is looking for in a man with these unlikely words:

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. (I Timothy 3:1 NKJV)

We learned in our last study that the word “faithful” means, “here is a truth that will stand the test of time”. Not only was it true when Paul wrote it, *it will always be true because the God who said it is true*. It is an absolute. It is a noble goal to stretch for the character qualities that make a man qualified by God’s standards to tend the flock of Christ. The objective is not to ambitiously seek the office of an overseer; that would be in opposition to all those scriptural admonitions about seeking to be exalted. The goal is to stretch forward with all the energy we possess to *become the quality of man that God is looking for*. How important is it? It ought to be the consuming passion of every man’s life... to become one of the *few good men* God is looking for.

Here is how Paul begins his checklist, the first thing he looks for on the resume of a Christian man:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife... (I Timothy 3:2 NKJV)

We venture into this next explosive area of spiritual truth with fear and trembling, but with a spirit of expectation as well. We have already investigated what the word “blameless” means. And we have already determined that not only does that quality stand on its own: it is, in essence, an umbrella which covers *all that follows*. In other words, Paul is saying, “God’s kind of man will have nothing which can be charged against him. *Even should he be blindsided, unexpectedly accused, his character will be so spotless there will be no danger of being attacked*. Now, Paul goes on, here are the attributes of a blameless man: 1) He will be the husband of one wife.

Now you may be saying, “I’m only married to one woman; I can put a check mark by that one.” Or you may be thinking “One woman is all any man can handle...God didn’t even need to include that.” You are slightly on the wrong wavelength. You have missed God’s heart and missed God’s goal for the godly man. The issue isn’t how many wives you have at one time, though *it certainly includes that*.

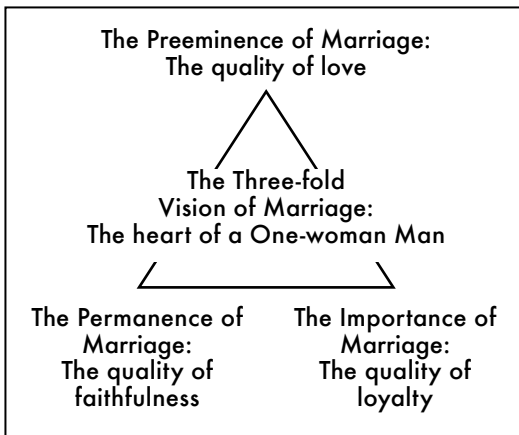
One common interpretation is “married only once”, or a “once-married man”. A few even carry it to the extreme that it means a man who is married only once, *even if his wife dies*.

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Still others go beyond that and say it means that to be an elder or pastor one must be married. Paul refuted both positions, and few theologians seem to support either of those two extremes. Even those who are not the most conservative, however, seem to indicate that it does mean that to hold these offices a man must be *married only once*, in the Scriptural sense. That would mean not divorced and remarried. But it would not necessarily exclude those who had *never married*.

The Greek phrase is *mias* (one) *gunaikos* (woman) *andra* (man). The literal translation, according to Wuest is “a man of one woman”, or when used of the marriage relationship “a husband of one wife”. He goes on to say that “the two nouns are without the definite article, which construction emphasizes character or nature. Thus, one can translate ‘a one-wife sort of husband.’” Wuest concludes by comparing the character strength involved with that of an Airedale who is considered a “one-man dog”. It has a kind of unbridled allegiance that never wavers, no matter what. He belongs to his master, and his master is the total object of his loyalty and his affection.

Thus, the translation “a one-woman sort of a man” is probably the most accurate we can find. It includes three basic thoughts which we shall endeavor to explore: 1) the marriage relationship and its permanence, 2) the husband’s allegiance to his wife and its importance, and 3) the selfless surrender demanded of the man of God and its preeminence. We may come to the conclusion that most of us don’t understand and identify with all three. But God, remember, is looking for *a few good men*.



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There is a three-stage expression, then, of the mind of God where the man of God and his marriage are concerned: the permanence of the relationship, the importance of the relationship, and the preeminence of the relationship. One involves the character quality of faithfulness, one the quality of loyalty, one the quality of love. And all are wrapped up in this one phrase “the husband of one wife”.

A ONE-WOMAN MAN: A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP

The first aspect of the one-woman man’s life is that he views marriage as God does...as something eternal, and therefore He sees it as God does, as indivisible. When Jesus encountered opposition on the Father’s view of marriage in Matthew, chapter 19, the disciples responded, “This is a hard saying.” This is tough. This is not “natural”. Jesus answered literally: “I know, not everyone can handle it, because it’s not ‘natural’, it’s ‘supernatural’, but from the beginning that’s what marriage has been all about.” What they couldn’t handle was God’s decree that “what God hath joined together let no man put asunder”. Marriage is for keeps.

Marriage is a picture of Christ’s relationship to the church. And as we view this trinity of principles in the light of Christian leadership, we will see that because of that portrait, a man must be a once-married man to lead the church. And step one in being a once-married man is having been married only once in the scriptural sense.

Does this mean that someone who has been divorced as a Christian cannot serve as an elder or deacon? I think it does. Does it mean they are less spiritual? Definitely not. Does it mean they cannot have an effective ministry? Definitely not. It simply means that *because of the indelible portrait that marriage typifies*, the shepherds of the flock *cannot violate the illustration of the permanence of salvation without violating their calling*.

The divorced man cannot serve in these roles for the same reason women cannot serve in these roles. It is not their spirituality in question: it is their ability to represent what the portrait represents: Christ and His eternal commitment to His bride, the Church. Christ will never leave us or forsake us. Never. Therefore, marriage was designed by God to demonstrate the security we have in Him. Were the church to permit men to lead it who have been twice married, it would be sending out confusing signals

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about Christ's eternal commitment to us. Therefore, stage one is simply, God's one-woman man must be a once-married man.

Not everyone agrees on the variables, Beloved. Some argue that divorce before conversion doesn't count. But I think it's hard to reconcile that with Matthew 19. Some argue a divorce on grounds of adultery without remarriage doesn't count. Let me remind you of two things and we'll pass over this somewhat sensitive area. First, put yourself under the authority of the church God places you in and accept their interpretation. The powers that be are ordained of God.

Secondly, and more importantly, the issue isn't one of guilt. You have nothing to prove. If you are divorced and in the church you have nothing to prove. The issue isn't one of guilt. The issue is one of portrayal, and if you might damage the portrait of the security of the believer one iota. Or, if you might cause one person to stumble who doesn't know your circumstances, ask yourself, "Is it worth it?" How you demonstrate Christ is what's important, not what position you might hold in the church.

But, that's only a small part of what's being said. The fact that a man has been married only once does not of itself satisfy this requirement for leadership. The word "once-married" literally means a "one-woman kind of man" and thus carries with it two more stages of impact.

A ONE-WOMAN MAN: A LOYAL RELATIONSHIP

Part two of this trilogy of qualities has to do with a man's *attitude* towards this one woman he has remained married to all those years. The root meaning of the Greek has to do with a kind of loyalty that *will not be corrupted or compromised*. By going back to that Airedale illustration, we get the gist of this aspect of the one-woman man. He only has eyes for her. Not because she *deserves it*. She may or she may not. We certainly don't deserve our Savior's love. Not because she *returns his love*. She may or she may not. We certainly do not adequately return or reflect His love. In fact our love is not even a factor in His love for us.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:10 NKJV)

That's love. It is initiated by one who *chooses to set His love upon us by choice in spite of how undeserving and how*

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unresponsive we are. Deuteronomy 7:7 reminds us of the basis upon which God selected Israel; it is the same as Christ's reason for choosing us.

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers...
(Deuteronomy 7:7,8 NKJV)

So God loves us not because we are lovely or lovable, but because He chose to. And once He chose to, He chose to keep His word...no matter what. That's what those two passages are saying. And what Paul is saying with his "one-woman man" requirement is that the man who would lead the church of the Living God must have the kind of loyalty to the woman he chooses to give his life to as Christ has for us.

God's man won't spend his time wondering what it would have been like if... or what it would be like if even now he decided to... God's man won't ever withhold his love from his wife. Not because of how she cooks or how she looks. His love will never be predicated on how well she responds to him, or even if she responds to him at all. His love will be Christ's love personified. And the less we return His love, the more He gives Himself to us. In fact, the very nature of His love is such that it cannot change. He cannot, by nature of His being, love us any less because of anything we do. He may be disappointed. He may be grieved. He may even be wounded. But His love never fails. That's what I Corinthians 13 means when it says:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity; but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.
(I Corinthians 13:4-8a NKJV)

That is a God's eye description of a godly man's love for his wife. He is a one-woman man. He stays with her, no matter what, and His heart beats only for her, *no matter what*. Because she is so deserving? No. Because she *is yours*. The rivers may cease to flow. The clouds may cease releasing their precious drops of rain. The sun may refuse to shine. But the man of God *never stops loving his wife*. Never. Hard? No, impossible! (Apart from God). But men, God lives in us... and He in us wants us to demonstrate

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to a lost and dying world just what agape love is all about. In that incredible drama that we are enacting on the stage of life, we get the glorious privilege of playing the part of the Son. The women are to quietly submit, no matter what, because they play the role of the church. We talk a lot about that. But, guys, they are the responders. It isn't our job to badger them into submission. It is our job to love them so much that they want to return that love. But even if they never do, we are to love them the more. We are, that is, if we are to be...the one-woman man God designed us to be.

A ONE-WOMAN MAN: A SERVING RELATIONSHIP

So the one-woman man stays in place no matter what, and he is loyal to his wife no matter what. That's stage one and two. Remain in place, and focus your heart only on her to the exclusion of all others, whether she appears to be deserving or not, whether she returns your love or not.

But that's not the clincher. The third stage of love is the ultimate stage of love, and it is, I believe, what this passage is talking about. The first two almost go without saying. Listen to how God defines the love of a one-woman man in Ephesians 5,

Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (Ephesians 5:25 NKJV)

He didn't just stay with us. He didn't just vow to be faithful to us. He gave Himself for us.

Beloved, there's a lot of difference between loving your wife and loving your wife as Christ loved the church.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:13 NKJV)

And God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners [without hope and without worthiness], Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NKJV)

The one-woman man is a dying man. He is in the process of dying daily for his one woman. First, he dies to himself. Her needs come first. Then, he dies to the world. No matter what the world says or wants or claims to say he needs, her needs come first. And finally, if need be, even the thought of giving his life physically for her would not require a second thought. He is portraying Christ to the world, and therefore his example is this:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,

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but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.
(Philippians 2:3-8 NKJV)

That's what it means to be a one-woman man. Sure, he knows he's the spiritual leader, and sure, he knows that his wife is supposed to quietly be in submission to his authority. But he does not view his rank as something to be clutched at. But rather, he takes on the mind of the One he is portraying. He becomes a servant. He begins to devote his life to making his wife happy, to making his wife successful, to making his wife mature. But suppose she doesn't appreciate it?

He humbles himself even further. He becomes obedient to the Father's commandment to love even to the point of death; if need be, the most humiliating form of death imaginable. The one-woman man is a dying man. He is dying to himself while he is serving his one woman.

That's not the part of the husband-wife relationship we talk about most of the time. It's not palatable most of the time. It wasn't in Israel when Jesus came, either. A man in that day could divorce his wife if his eggs weren't cooked right. He had all the rights. She had none. But, it's not an issue of rights. It's an issue of what's right. And in God's eyes, what's right is surrender.

Does that mean the man becomes a wimp? Does it mean his wife makes the decisions? Does it mean that, in an effort to please her, he overlooks the welfare of his children or of the work of God? Of course not, quite the opposite. Paul is saying, "The real man doesn't have to prove he's a man by leading his wife around with a collar." The real man proves he's a man by serving his wife. He is responsible for the spiritual decisions and for the spiritual welfare of the family. He is the decision-maker, but he doesn't do it condescendingly or vindictively. He does it gently, lovingly, kindly, affectionately, understandingly.

Don't ever stop reading Ephesians 5 with verse 24. Verses 25-27 give us the reason the husband is to give himself

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away, and the reason why we are supposed to die for our wives. It is the why of a dying husband.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. (Ephesians 5:25-28a NKJV)

The reason we are to love our wives with such an undying love, gentlemen, is not so we can write a love story that will thrill the heart of man. The greatest love story has already been written by God. The reason we are to be a body of dying men, of one-woman men who serve our wives in utter humility, dying to ourselves, and if need be dying physically...is because we want to present them as holy gifts to God. We want to present them as women set apart and made whole by the Word of God, who believed the Word of God because they saw it alive in us. The man of God who would lead the flock of God must love his wife so much that a watching, waiting world sees a picture of a God who 1) will never leave us or forsake us for He is a faithful God, 2) He will never stop loving us no matter what we do. He is a loyal God, and 3) He will thus give Himself away for us without regard to our worthiness, because by His death He brings us life.

That is the three-fold calling of the one-woman man. To remain her husband, no matter what. To keep on loving her, no matter what. And to do so by giving himself away, no matter what...even if it means dying.

God's man must be willing to die at any time for his faith. God's testing ground is the home. His focus is the wife. She is God's hand-painted portrait of the Body of Christ. And how the man gives himself to his one woman will tell the world how Christ gives Himself to His one bride, the Church.

It will make no sense from a human perspective. The world will scoff in derision and they are doing that. That's all the more reason we know it's of God. But it makes nothing but sense in the light of the Scriptures.

I think it's time we men go home and fall on our faces before God, asking Him to give us a fresh opportunity to die...for the one woman He has given us. If you are divorced and remarried

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it is all the more important that you give yourself like that to the wife you now have. You are repainting the picture for the world. Do it with vivid strokes from the brush of the love of God. If you are single, or widowed, or alone, God wants you to simply give yourself to Christ with that kind of abandonment. He is your portrait. If you have a wife, she is your picture book. She is the story you are writing for even the angels to read. She is your tangible way to express the amazing grace God has bestowed on you.

And from the pen of Paul I simply encourage you to try it. Your wife will be amazed, the world will be amazed, the church will be amazed and God will be pleased. And you will be becoming one of those few good men God so desperately needs. You will have begun by becoming...a one-woman man.

Father,

These are things we don't like to hear, and, yet, in the light of scriptural principles, they're so exciting. They're impossible to live because they so run cross grain to the nature of man, so opposite of the world's position.

Some of us here this morning, Father, need to scrape ourselves off the floor and go home and begin to examine the kind of love we have for our wives. We need to examine our willingness to remain in place, our willingness to remain loyal but, more than that, our willingness to die daily to serve the one woman You've given us.

We pray for the singles in our midst that they might somehow sense the awesomeness of marriage, in light of these commandments, and fall on their faces before You in utter amazement. We pray for the widows and widowers in our midst that you might give them a kind of abandonment to You that would demonstrate this quality with such joy that the whole world would be in amazement.

We pray for those who are divorced or divorced and remarried that you might give them a vision of the reality of this principle and that they might demonstrate it in whatever role they're in in life today.

But Father, most of all, for those of us who are married and are here this morning or reading to this lesson, we just simply pray that we might be overcome with joy that You've made this

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*kind of grace possible, this kind of picture available, and this
kind of love so free.*

We pray in Christ's name,

Amen.

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