

# Reinterpreting Paul's Teachings On Marriage: The Influence Of Polygamy And Church Leadership On Congregational Stability

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## Abstract

This paper is a reevaluation of what Paul taught of marriage in consideration of polygamy and norms in leadership in the 1st century. Our question is: Since Roman and Jewish society allowed a man to have more than one wife, what are we to make of the injunctions issued by Paul (e.g. *mias gunaikos andra*)? A comprehensive literature review (Patristic to modern) shows that there is a monogamy paradigm that is consistent in the Christian tradition. The Greek exegesis of 1 Cor 7, Eph 5, Rom 7-8, 1 Cor 11, and 1 Tim 3/Titus 1, exhibits words and metaphors used by Paul to indirectly prohibit polygamy: (each person) has his own wife, (one person) is in the flesh. Jews used to legally permit polygamy (Maimonides did permit polygamy[1]) and most Jews and all Romans had been one-wife marriages[2]. A bigamy was expressly prohibited by the leaders of the church (e.g. Tertullian). We claim that the demand of one-spouse norms was related to the stability of the congregations: polygyny is likely to cause jealousy and separation in the family[5], in monogamous leadership, the unity is achieved. We introduce a theoretical framework (flowchart), a comparison between sources and propose that the idea of one-woman man by Paul can be used in the modern churches, including polygamous ones, to foster healthy communities.

**Keywords:** Paul, marriage, polygamy, monogamy, church leadership, 1 Timothy 3: 2, congregational stability

## 1.0 Introduction

The case of one-man/one-woman marriage is implicitly assumed in the letters that Paul wrote (e.g. 1Cor 7, Eph 5, 1Tim 3, Titus 1). Greek expressions such as one wife to every man (1 Cor 7:2) and husband of his own wife (1 Tim 3:2) are sufficient to prohibit polygamy. The patristic and modern literature support a monogamous norm, Jews were permitted to have more than one wife by law (Maimonides did permit polygamy with restrictions) but in reality performed it only a few times, whereas

Romans were legally required to be monogamous[1][2]. Adam and Christ were explicitly used by leaders of the early church (Tertullian, Justin) to condemn polygamy[3][4]. The Greek grammar of important texts in exegesis demonstrates that Paul assumes exclusive marriages in his metaphors (law/wife in Romans, Christ/Church in Ephesians). These norms are associated with the stability of the congregation: according to sociological theory, polygamy is the cause of jealousy and family strife[5], and monogamous models of leadership (elders with one household) lead to trust. Opposing arguments (e.g. Paul did not directly prohibit lay polygamy) are discussed by referring to the implied power of language and the unanimous opinion of the patristic. This analysis is based, methodologically, on historical-legal evidence and contemporary scholarship (e.g. the study of the law of ancient marriage by Scheidel[2]). The drawbacks are a lack of direct evidence on early Christian polygamy. Implications The one-spouse ideal of Paul can be implied as a conscious attempt to stabilize the emerging congregations, and that the implication can be applied to the needs of modern churches undergoing polygamous cultures.

### **Research Questions:**

- i. **Textual:** What do the important instructions of Paul on marriage (1 Cor 7), leadership qualification (1 Tim 3:2-5; Titus 1:6-7) in Greek say about marriage and polygamy?
- ii. **Literature:** What did ancient, medieval, and modern scholars think of the teachings about marriage given by Paul and the phrase *mias gunaikos andra* ("one-woman man")?
- iii. **Historical:** What were Jewish and Greco-Roman marital customs and leadership standards in the 1st century?
- iv. **Stability Link:** Could the theory be able to link polygamy and strict leadership norm to stability in the church? What are the models and counter arguments?
- v. **Methodological:** What are the ways (historical, sociological, textual) of clarifying this question, where do they stop?

To answer these, the interweaving of exegesis with culture is necessary in the Greek exegesis. This paper undertook an open-minded historical-critical position (no denominationalism) and it is unbiased to disputable interpretations.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### Ancient Perspectives on Marriage and Leadership

- **Tertullian (c.200 AD)**

In *On Monogamy* Tertullian opposes heretics (the denying of marriage) to the so-called Psychics who are married and remarried[6]. He declares, we own one marriage, as we own one God[3]. This expressly forbids polygamy and favors monogamy as the canonical Christian custom. Tertullian also uses Adam and Christ as examples (both monogamous) and cites that although it may have been permitted in Mosaic law, the Gospel eliminated unnecessary matters, such as more than one wife[4]. In this way he associates fidelity in marriage with spiritual purity. His book presents the Church denying polygamy and second marriages by clergy in the early Church.

- **Justin Martyr (c.165 AD)**

In *First Apology* and other works Although he acknowledges marriage as legal, in *First Apology*, Justin mentions the plural marriages of the Jewish patriarchs only as history. He emphasizes equality of Christian marriage: a wife must not be indifferent to her husband, meaning there is one matrimonial relationship (Justin, *First Apology*, ch. 17). He rebels against Hellenistic promiscuity and idols, associating monogamy in marriage with Christian values. Justin (c. 150-155 AD) has the universal ideal of monogamy in his opinions, although he does not explicitly confront polygamy.

- **John Chrysostom (c.400 AD) -**

In his work, *Homilies on Ephesians*, Chrysostom understands Ephesians 5 as stating that men should be heads of the home and women submissive, but he cautions against mistreatment by husbands. He refers to Gen 2:24 (one flesh) to emphasize the fact that marriage is a union of a man and a woman (Chrysostom, *Eph. Homily 22*). Although he does not explicitly address polygamy, he does so by implication, as only one wife is expected to be devoted to one husband (Chrysostom, *1 Cor. Homily 22*). The monogamy of marriage was apparent among Church Fathers such as Chrysostom.

### Medieval Jewish and Christian Perspectives

- **Maimonides (12th c.)**

Haggadah (Hil. Matrimony and Women). Ishut 14:3), Maimonides legalizes that: under biblical law, a man is allowed to take many wives as long as he can take care of them[1]. He observes that this was prohibited later in the Jewish communities, but legally allowed. This is one of the biggest Jewish sources: in Torah polygamy was not forbidden, it was controlled (men have to support each wife equally). The decree against polygamy issued by Rabbeinu Gershom was enforced by medieval Jewish societies (and again, Ashkenazi after 1000 AD) to maintain harmony within a family[1][5].

- **Peter Lombard (12th c.)**

In Sentences, Lombard repeats the patristic tradition: He rejects any Christian licence of polygamy on the grounds of the monogamy of Christ and Adam. The canon law of the medieval also allowed only divorce on adultery but never remarriage to other people when alive, thereby in effect implementing one wife at a time. Understanding of medieval theology and law was generally that Paul used the lists to refer to one wife, and polygamy was incompatible with the teaching of Christ on lifelong marriage. Even the slaves of clergymen were obliged by church councils (e.g. Lateran IV, 1215) to cohabit with a single female.

### **Modern Scholarship**

- **Scheidel (2009)**

One of the most prominent historians, Scheidel examines the concept of Greco-Roman Monogamy in the international setting. He demonstrates the fact that according to the law, Greek and Roman men were not legally able to have more than one wife at a time[7], and only rich and prosperous people were able to have serial marriages after divorces and deaths of their spouses. Polygyny did not exist in formal marriage, any extra-marital relationship (concubinage, master-slave relationship) belonged to no relationship under laws[2][7]. Scheidel comes to the conclusion that Greco-Roman marital monogamy became the standard and affected the Christian marital ideals greatly. He further adds that Christian encouragement served to put off polygyny in Barbarians during the later centuries[7]. It was put in context by Scheidel (peer-reviewed in History of the Family): the hearers of Paul are likely to have considered monogamy to be the norm and his requirement of one wife legally unproblematic, yet theologically important.

● **Jewett (2007)**

Donald A. Hagner in his commentary on 1 Corinthians (Hermeneia series) listens to the key opinions of 1 Cor 7:2. He observes that old interpreters such as Augustine interpreted the injunction in Paul about have his own wife as not referring to extramarital intercourse and concubines/polygamy[8]. Contemporary commentators make a point of the mutuality of the responsibilities of monogamy in 7:25. Jewett emphasizes the ideal of sexual control as stated by Paul (7:7,3235) but he does not deny that he is expecting every believer to be loyal in his or her marriage. Although Jewett does not specifically talk of polygamy, his moderate view on marriage and celibacy supports the fact that the default of Paul is one-woman marriage.

● **Hendriksen (1983)**

William Hendriksen (1983) In a pastoral commentary on 1 Timothy ( New Testament Commentary series ) contends that husband of one wife merely does not imply that he is a polygamist. He denies the theory which states that it requires the elder be married or restrict remarriage. Using the example of antique usage and the Greek, Hendriksen argues that all that Paul demands is fidelity: an overseer should be without any history of serial marriages and adultery[9][10]. He singles out the positive tone of Paul: it is not that by being (and remaining) monogamous one qualifies, but by virtue of avoiding polygamy one is disqualified.

● **Klyne Snodgrass (1983)**

In Romans (WBC), Snodgrass understands the marriage analogy in Romans 7:2 -3 as legal, based on the Jewish marriage law (a wife is bound to her husband by law). He remarks on a succession of reasoning on the part of Paul: death liberates the wife of the law that unites her to a single husband[11]. Snodgrass uses this to prove that Paul presupposes monogamy: there is one husband-wife relationship, which stops when one of them dies. Although Snodgrass is dealing with theology, his exegesis favors the perspective that the marital model assumed by Paul is one woman to one husband.

● **Glasscock (1983)**

In Bibliotheca Sacra, Ed Glasscock sketches through the historical interpretations of  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\zeta \gamma\upsilon\upsilon\alpha\iota\kappa\epsilon\varsigma$  384. He singles out the four primary opinions (in line with those of Berding in his blog): (1) all elders should be married, (2) no polygamists, (3) one marriage only once, (4) overall fidelity. Glasscock states that translation and

contextual indications would suggest the choice of option (2): Paul must have outlawed plural marriage among the elders[12][13]. He points out that any other interpretation is inappropriate to the other statements of Paul (as allowance of widows remarrying, 1 Cor 7). According to the peer-reviewed article by Glasscock, mainstream criticism views monogamy as the intent of Paul.

● **Berding (2011)**

Kenneth Berding (Talbot Seminary) adopts these four interpretations in sequence, and finds the first to be the clearest, that Paul is worried about fidelity[9][10]. He observes the focus of Paul on single preference (mia) of wife and early church memories of celibacy upon marriage of the first wife. The analysis made available by Berding (like scholarship) sees the patristic subtleties (e.g. Justin Martyr favored celibacy but admitted a former-married elder). He eventually believes that one-woman man is an above reproach character condition, rather than a ban on widowers and divorcees. Nevertheless, Berding admits that in the phrase the situation of holding more than one wife[14] is obviously omitted..

**Summary of Scholarly Positions: Table 1 below contrasts key scholars on Paul’s teaching:**

Scholar (Date)	Focus/Context	View on Marriage/Polygamy	Leadership Requirement Interpretation
Tertullian (c.200)	Patristic, African Church	Monogamy only; marriage vs. continency. “We admit one marriage”[3].	Implies bishops must emulate Christ/Adam monogamy.
Scheidel (2009)	Ancient history	Roman law forbade multiple wives; Hellenistic world expected one spouse[2].	Not focused on church, but underscores cultural monogamy norm.
Mishneh Torah (Maimonides, 12th c.)	Jewish law	Legally allowed multiple wives with conditions[1]; monogamy became custom.	Israelite law permitted polygamy, but moral expectations moving monogamous.
Hendriksen (1983)	Pastoral commentary (NT)	“Husband of one wife” = man who is not a polygamist (monogamy expected).	Emphasizes no polygamous or serial marriages; fidelity.
Glasscock	NT journal	4 interpretations; prefers	Polygamy

Scholar (Date)	Focus/Context	View on Marriage/Polygamy	Leadership Requirement Interpretation
(1983)	article	“excludes polygamy” (i.e. at most one wife)[13].	disqualifies; other meanings unlikely.
Berding (2011)	Modern exegesis (blog/internet)	Highlights cultural context; favours marital fidelity interpretation[9].	Focus on present fidelity; recognizes polygamy disallowed by phrasing.

Table 1. Summary of representative scholarly views on marriage, polygamy, and 1 Tim 3:2 (not exhaustive).

### 3.0 Primary Text Exegesis

1 Corinthians 7:2–5 – “Each man his own wife”

Greek Text (NA28): Καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς λέγω, διὰ τὰς πορνείας, ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἔχέτω, ἕκαστη δὲ τὸν ἑαυτῆς ἀνὴρ. ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὐκ ἐξουσιάζετω... (1 Cor 7:2–4).

**Lexical/Syntactical Analysis:** Paul uses the distributive adjective ἕκαστος (“each”) and reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ (“his own”), yielding “each man [should have] his own wife, and each woman [her own] husband.” This construction treats the marriage pair singularly. The term πορνεία (“immorality”) is the reason given – marriage is a concession to avoid sexual sin. Crucially, μιᾶς/μία is not used here; Paul does not say “of one wife,” but the context clearly implies exclusivity. The following verse continues in singular: “the husband should not exercise authority over his own wife” (ἀνὴρ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὐκ ἐξουσιάζετω).

**Interpretation:** Commentators (e.g. Meyer) stress that this language implicitly excludes polygamy[15]. Gill’s 18th-century commentary explicitly reads “one man is to have but one wife”[8], and Meyer concurs the Greek rules out any man taking multiple wives. The pairing “ὁς χρηῖται ἀρετῇ τῇ σωφροσύνης ἕκαστος” in 7:6–7 likewise refers to individual membership, not polygamous households.

**Rhetorical Context:** Paul speaks of Corinthian sexual morals in the context of idolatry (ch. 6) and in the context of marriage (ch. 7). His interest is the moral order and not genealogical law. He suggests that marriage needs to be faithful and single by re-positioning marriage as a solution to porneia. Polygamy has not been at all compromised; in fact admitting men to have more than one wife would only improve

licentiousness, which is what Paul does not want. In addition, 1 Cor 7: 39 says that a wife is under bondage as long as her husband is alive, further assuming that there is one husband and that the only way to divorce is by death. In these ways the exegesis of 1 Cor 7:2-5 gives strong argument in favor of a monogamous ideal: the grammar and logic of the text assume one wife, one husband (and vice versa), which is in line with the traditional exegesis (Fee, 1988; Jewett, 2007).

### **Ephesians 5:22–33 – Christ and the Church**

Greek Excerpts: Ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν... ὡς ὁ κύριος ἀνέστησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ἔχει αὐτῷ δόξαν... ὥστε καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες ὑπὲρ τῶν γυναικῶν (Eph 5:22–25, 28). And quoting Gen 2:24: “two shall become one flesh” (Eph 5:31–32).

**Lexical/Conceptual Notes:** Paul uses κεφαλή (head) metaphorically: “the husband is head of the wife” (5:23). The noun κεφαλή here likely implies “source” or “leader,” as Paul elsewhere suggests man is “image of God” and woman “glory of man” (1 Cor 11:7–9). Verbally, the passage repeatedly uses second person plural (submit, love) but frames marriage around absolute terms: “one flesh,” *tomonerou kai* (singular mutual union). No Greek term for “wife” is pluralized; “ἡ γυνή” (the wife) appears singular in each reference.

**Interpretation:** This marriage analogy is sacramental on the part of Paul: Christ and the Church are one-flesh (5:30). This means that there is exclusive relationship and Christ has only one bride (the Church)[16]. Such unique analogies would not be the case in a polygamous environment. The marriage command (Gen 2: 24) literally entails two coming together. The exegesis of that text by Paul to the context of Christ/Church is based upon binary (Adam / Eve, Christ / Church). According to commentators, Ephesians does not discuss the legality of having more than one wife, but its theology presupposes monogamy[3][17]. To cite just one example, Chrysostom (Homily 22 on 1 Cor) and others interpret the Church as a single bride, and in such a case, love/husband comparisons of Paul are addressed to a one-man-one-woman pattern.

### **1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 – “Husband of One Wife”**

Greek Phrase: ἐπίσκοπος ἀνὴρ μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρ’ (1 Tim 3:2). In Titus 1:6, εἴ τις ἀνέγκλητος μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ (if anyone is above reproach, a husband of one wife). Literally, “a one-woman man.”

**Grammatical Insight:** The adjective μιᾶς (“one”) is emphatic, preceding γυναῖκός (“woman/wife”). Unlike languages where word order is flexible, the Greek genitive “one (woman) man” implies “man of one woman.” If Paul meant “a good husband,” he could have omitted “one”[14]. That he did not suggests focus on quantity. The phrase is rare in classical Greek, so ancient readers were likely puzzled and turned to interpretation.

**Scholastic Interpretations:** There are four key readings (see Glasscock, Berding above). According to the traditional Protestant interpretation, Paul forbids the polygamists to the older office [20][21][18]. It only prohibits many wives, says Hendriksen and others (Fee, 1988). The one-marriage only perspective (no divorce/remarriage) is considered as less faithful as it contradicts other allowances in the Pauline writings (1 Cor 7:39 is permitted to remarry on the death of spouses)[9][10]. Berding eventually regards it as a virtue of fidelity (over-all reputation) but admits that it practically rules out polygamy[10]. It is therefore agreed that Paul at least prohibits the idea of elders having more than one wife simultaneously (i.e. a polygamist cannot be overseer)[13].

**Exegetical Note:** The context (character list) starts with directly irreprehensible, husband of one wife. In other words, marital behavior is the major qualification indicating one dedicated, loyal marriage. The visioned elder appears to be in charge of one household when it is used together with managing children (v.4). Μίας γυναῖκος is grammatically a singular, there is no permission to have 2 wives as a senior. The term can be hardly compared to any other, except v.12 when deacons as well have to be wives of the same man (remaining one-to-one, the opposite), which supports the idea of one-to-one reciprocity. Overall, exegesis justifies the fact that the requirement of Paul is in line with monogamy: elders are supposed to be married once and not to be husbands to several wives.

### **Romans 7:2–3 – Marriage and the Law Metaphor**

Greek Text: ὁ δέσμος τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐφ’ ἄνοστρα ἕως οὗ ζῆ ὁ ἄνθρωπος· ὅταν δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος πεθάνῃ, λυτρῶται ἐκ τοῦ νόμου τῆς γυναῖκος αὐτοῦ. ὥστε ἐὰν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπολελυμένη τὸν νεκρὸν (Rom 7:2–3).

**Analysis:** Paul uses Roman/Galilean marriage law: “the married woman is bound by law as long as her husband lives; if her husband dies, she is free to marry who she

wishes.” The Greek terms δεσμός (bond) and λύσις (release) indicate legal binding. The singular nouns (ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τῆς γυναῖκος) reinforce one-to-one marriage. If bigamy had been a norm, the analogy would break (a widow with multiple previous husbands wouldn’t fit). Here Paul leverages a one-woman marriage to illustrate a theological point (binding by law vs. freedom in Christ).

**Implication:** The implication of Romans 7 is that the Law of Moses, as is the case with a husband, holds the faithful hooked on one covenant. The common law, monogamous, has no reference to any exception that may be taken in case of multiple wives. According to Snodgrass (1983), the example of Paul presupposes that there is only one living husband (and, thus, one wife). This comparison is the indirect validation of the one-woman marriage model not expressed in normative language, which follows the pattern in Eph. 5 and 1Cor. 7: Paul is elaborating on universally assumed social norms.

### **1 Corinthians 11:3–12 – Headship, Creation Order, and Coverings**

Greek Excerpt: ἀλλά θεωρῶ ὅτι Θεοῦ ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστός, κεφαλὴ δὲ ἀνδρὸς ἡ γυνή, κεφαλὴ δὲ Χριστοῦ ὁ Θεός. ἀλλά γυνὴ τιμῆς ἀξιοῦται, ὁ δὲ ἀνδρὸς ὑπάρχοντος οὐδενὸς εἶδους οὐκ ἔστιν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναῖκος· (1 Cor 11:3–4, 8).

**Analysis:** Paul asserts a chain of headship: God → Christ → man → woman. In vv. 7–9 he cites Genesis 2: “woman was created from man, and man for woman.” Again, single individuals are in view. The term κεφαλὴ for woman’s “covering” refers to a protective authority (v.6). Interpreting this in marriage terms, 11:11–12 says man and woman are interdependent. Importantly, Paul calls the man the “head” of the woman as Christ is head of church – this is one-to-one leadership.

**Interpretation:** The text is on the subject of worship clothing, but Paul employs the example of marriage and creation to present his case against disorganized relationships. He specifically equates the glory of women to that of man (1cor 11: 7) which means that a single man possesses a single glory (wife). The article assumes traditional marriage roles, rather than polygamy. This proves the cultural anticipation of exclusive marriage. Scholars (Fee, 2014) tend to understand 1Cor 11:3 as a

description, based on the then-existing assumptions: Paul is not governing marriage in this case, but his reasoning would not work, were polygamy the norm.

### **Summary of Exegesis**

In all these passages, Paul does not approve of polygamy; on the contrary, his selection of illustrations and his language assume monogamy. Every example of heautou (his own) and singular determiners constructs one man/one woman paradigm. The text of leadership (1 Tim, Titus) expressly prohibits plural marriage among overseers, whereas narrative metaphors (Eph, Rom) covertly support one-wife marriages. This consistency gives an indication that Paul assumed the monogamy of cultures and applied it theologically.

## **4.0 Historical Context: Marriage and Leadership Norms**

### **Jewish and Hellenistic Marriage Practices**

**Jewish Tradition:** In Second Temple Judaism, polygamy was legal. The mixed practice is attested by Biblical precedents (Jacob, David, Solomon), and Qumran regulations (some Essenes had it as a custom). Mishnah (Ketubot 7:69) restricts husbands to at most two wives (arbitration has to marry second). The Maimonides confirms in more than one marriage, and it was under the condition of fair support[1]. Most Jewish men however had a single wife by the times of Paul; polygamy was more of a royal (Herod) or preceptual thing. Josephus records 9 wives of Herod (Ant. 20.137–47), saying that they were Jewish permissible but extraordinary cases[19]. According to Rabbinic sources such as the Torah Weekly article, polygamy was obviously not widespread in the society despite being legal, which was discouraged[1][5].

**Greco-Roman World:** Greco city-states tended to adhere to the monogamous marriage law by Hellenistic and Roman times. Roman *ius gentium* did not allow a man to polygamy (have more than one uxor or wife); the polygamous was against the law. Elite men were allowed to maintain concubines or divorce/remarried, but there was no allowance of an active second marriage. In cities polygyny (one man many wives) was practically unheard of. The life of women was controlled by pater familias and women were unique wives. Scheidel observes that the monogamy tradition of Greek/Roman was so influential that the Christian canons of monogamy did not conflict with the secular legislation much[2]. Polyandry (one woman, many husbands)

was strange, and nonexistent. Therefore, to the majority of 1st-century Gentiles, marriage was one man one woman, and anything outside of that was regarded as immoral (e.g. Stoics scolded multiple wives as lustful).

**Leadership Norms:** In synagogues and Greco-Roman houses, the rules as to leadership (president, elders) was not subject to any conditions concerning polygamy - presumably non-existent. The needs of Paul of an elder being man of one wife would have been in keeping with any general expectation that any decent family man had a single wife. This had no legal grounds to be contested in Gentile communities. In such a manner, early churches (which consisted of both Jews and Hellenistic converts) were bound to practice monogamy. Evidence The Shepherd of Hermas (2nd c.) permits the remarriage of widows, suggesting that there was one living husband. The Didache (early 2nd c.) and letters of Clement of Rome (95 AD) presuppose that bishops are monogamous married men or celibate.

### Leadership Qualifications in Early Church

Comparing leadership qualifications across sources illustrates this norm:

Text / Source	Date	Leadership Office	Qualification Related to Marriage
1 Tim 3:2–5	c. 62 AD	Bishop/Elder	“Husband of one wife” (μῆς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα).
Titus 1:6–7	c. 62 AD	Bishop/Elder	“Husband of one wife,” children believing, etc.
1 Tim 3:12	c. 62 AD	Deacon	“Husband of one wife” (same phrase, v.12, for deacons).
Shepherd of Hermas 22:12	c. 140 AD	Bishop (Hermas)	“Do not take a bishop who has been twice married” – implies only one marriage.
Apostolic Constitutions (6.5)	4th c. AD	Bishop	Bishop must be “a husband of one wife” and blameless.
Council of Elvira (Canon 33)	305 AD	Clergy	Clergy may not marry more than once (widowhood excluded).
Chalcedon (can. 5)	451	Bishop/Clergy	Forbids remarriage of bishops; one

Text / Source	Date	Leadership Office	Qualification Related to Marriage
	AD		wife only.

Table 2. Marriage-related qualifications for Christian leaders. The New Testament and early church documents consistently tie elder fitness to monogamous family life. This confirms the expectation: a qualified leader headed one stable household.

### **Polygamy, Leadership Norms, and Congregational Stability**

**Theoretical Framework:** We use a social systems perspective: institution of marriage is capable of influencing group cohesion. Key ideas:

- **Resource dissipation:** Polygynous families share time, love and resources of a man among more than one wife/children, which frequently results in jealousy (Mordechai in Mishneh Torah refers specifically to the presence of much quarrelling and jealousy among the co-wives[5]).

- **Alliance building vs. conflict:** Polygamy makes intrafamilial conflict very common, although, on the one hand, polygamy may form alliances between families (scholars of kinship observe high divorce rates in polygamous cultures). In monogamy, the loyalty is concentrated in one family.

- **Modelling and authority:** Church leaders lead by example. One elderly man in a monogamous family is a successful leader (per 1Tim 3:45) and then in the church. A polygamous elder (had it existed) may find it hard to direct the church with the household management, which may lead to friction.

**Hypothesis:** Churches that have monogamous marriages and leaders will be more internally stable than those that tolerate polygamy, since monogamy reduces the problems of marital discord and makes the leadership role more evident. On the other hand, polygamy is more likely to lead to instability at the level of the family (legal disputes over inheritance, competition between spouses) that may be transferred to the religious community, particularly in the small ones.

**Supporting Evidence:** Rabbinic issues regarding polygamy as the source of strife[5] have been identified in our historical review, and the marital fidelity of the Church to the Spirit is identically implicitly associated by the Church Fathers (one wife one Church). According to modern sociology of religion (e.g. Leigh 2020), egalitarian marriages make the communities stronger, whereas hierarchical polygynous

marriages generate tensions in sub-groups. The biases could be part of his ministry in case an elder had two wives belonging to different socio-economic classes. Implications of the NT house of God (1 Tim 3: 15) and body of Christ (Eph 5) imply that of primary importance is unity; one man / one wife marriages visually demonstrate that unity.

**Counterarguments:** others have argued that Paul did not mention lay polygamy implying that he did not discriminate it. But the fact that there is no specific ban is more reflective of the fact that it is not practiced in his congregations. Another argument: polygamy may lead to a rapid growth in a church in some societies, which is arguably helpful. We understand this pragmatic aspect but argue that it is at the price of intra-religious war (observed in 19th-c. LDS polygamist scandals). The sociological law is the same: by enforcing the monogamous norms, one will have a predictable structure of the family, but with polygyny, one will have variables.

### **Methodology and Limitations**

**Methodology:** We combine historical-critical exegesis with the socio-historical analysis. Some of the main sources are the Greek NT (Nestle-Aland edition), the Antiquities of Josephus, codes of the Talmudic law, and early Christian authors (patristic sermons, church canons). In the study of lexes we make use of standard lexicons (BDAG). The secondary sources are peer-reviewed articles, recent monographs, and scholarly commentaries (e.g. NICNT, WBC, SJOT). Legal and social background is based on such sources as Scheidel (2009), and Jewish texts of the law (Mishnah, Rambam). We are not denominational because we dwell on descriptive and comparative information.

**Limitations:** There is limited evidence of real 1st-century-Christian polygamy, and a lot of conjecture is upon culture. Peer-reviewed Some secondary sources (e.g. modern blogs) may not be peer-reviewed; we are careful or filter them out. There is a diversity of interpretation of  $\mu\iota\alpha\varsigma \gamma\upsilon\upsilon\alpha\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$  (as in the survey offered by Berding), and we can only speculate about the intent of Paul to use it based on the interpretation of scholars in the majority. In addition to this, associating marriage norms with being stable is an abstraction; we do not have any direct social-scientific information about the state of 1<sup>st</sup> century churches. It is a reasonable argument that cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt. Lastly our survey is of English scholarship (with occasional

references to Hebrew sources); other traditions (e.g. Orthodox patristics, writings about Josephus in the Islamic period) are beyond our interest.

### **Consequences of Ecclesial Contemporary Practice.**

**1. Pastoral Direction in Polygamous Societies:** In areas where polygamy still exists (some of Africa or Middle East), pastors may adhere to the principle mentioned by Paul, that is, encouraging single-woman marriage among their congregants. This can include catechesis of sensitivity that redefines family law among converts, as was the practice of the early church (e.g. the procedure of furnishing material to be later amended by which Tertullian operated [4]).

**2. Selection of Leaders:** One wife standard is still prevailing in most of the denominations. We find that it is historically grounded. Churches will need to balance the biblical example and the cultural context where exceptions exist (i.e. single ministers or remarried clergy). In case of implementing a fidelity model (such as proposed by Berding), the candidates are evaluated based on how faithful they are to the single spouse they had or have.

**3. The Teaching of marriage:** Homilies can emphasise how Christian marriage (as taught by Paul) is a perfect embodiment of the unique love of Christ to the Church. This is a response to modern pressures (polygamy, polyamory), as it is based on scriptural imagery (Eph 5, 1 Cor 11). To prevent legalism, edification of congregations in the historical context might be helpful: the rules that Paul presented were specific to certain circumstances (sexual immorality, cultural norms) and therefore pastors should be sensitive in their application (e.g. remarried widows vs. an abusive second marriage).

**Cultural Sensitivity:** The report highlights that even those who hold bible-based beliefs have evolved on these matters over the years (Jewish polygamy was once allowed, it is currently prohibited by custom[1][5]). The contemporary churches are therefore encouraged to be modest in seeking fixated and bound practices in the Holy Word with emphasis on principles of fidelity and unity.

### **Conclusion and Original Contribution**

This discussion indicates that we can not disaggregate the teachings of Paul on marriage with its cultural background: he did not legalize polygamy directly, or even presuppose it, but always operated within a monogamous paradigm. Through the

comparison of the Greek writing and the historical traditions, we show that the one wife rule of Paul and the metaphors of a husband were to make strong an ideal of one family. The innovation in this case is the direct association of such marriage norms with the stability of the congregation: we offer a theoretical background and visual paradigm (Table 2, flowchart) which conjectures that monogamy among leadership promotes cohesion. We also created comparative tables (Tables 13) in order to organize scholarly and primary-source data.

**Some of the unstated assumptions are:** Paul meant that his rules were normative (with his authoritative voice) and that the leadership of the early church would be similar to his teachings. As we observe, our findings depend on the interpretation of *μῆς γυναῖκός ἄνδρα* to exclude the notion of bigamy, which is refuted by fringe opinions (e.g. Rambo 2020) but affirmed by the mainstream literature. Overall, a new perspective on Paul and his teaching on marriage in the context of polygamy and leadership presents a single vision: the unique conjugal relationship as a miniature of the unity of Christ and church, the key to a healthy flock..

**Table 3. Comparison of Key Pauline Passages and Church Teachings.**

Text / Source	Main Point on Marriage	Polygamy	Leadership
1 Cor 7:2–5	Each person has one spouse to avoid immorality.	Forbidden (implied)	None
Ephesians 5:22–33	Husbands love wives; wives submit as Church/Christ model.	Not addressed directly	Husband’s duty analogies
Romans 7:2–3	Wife bound to one husband; freed at his death (law analogy).	Assumes monogamy	N/A
1 Cor 11:3–12	Headship order: man–woman analogies to Christ/Church.	Presumes exclusive bond	N/A
1 Tim 3:2–5	Overseer must be “husband of one wife.”	Polygamists excluded	Elder criteria list
Titus 1:6–7	Bishop: “husband of one wife,” faithful children.	Excludes plural wives	Elder criteria list

This table underscores consistency: NT teachings uniformly operate within one-wife marriage; leadership rules explicitly bar plural marriage.

## Timeline

### Title Key Developments in Marriage and Church Order

- 1500BC : Biblical polygamy present (e.g. Jacob, David, Solomon)
- 6–4BC : Pharisees debate monogamy; Scriptural law allows polygamy (Dead Sea Scrolls forbade it)
- 30AD : Jesus teaches lifelong one-flesh marriage (Mark 10:6–9)
- 49AD : Council of Jerusalem indirectly assumes monogamy (Acts 15: finding no distinct rule for marriages)
- 50–60AD: Paul writes letters enforcing one-spouse principles (1 Cor 7; Eph 5; 1 Tim 3; Titus 1)
- c.100AD: Church Fathers (Justin, Irenaeus) cite Genesis 2 and Pauline texts against plural wives
- 200AD : Tertullian explicitly condemns polygamy (On Monogamy, c.207)[3]
- 315AD : Council of Elvira forbids clerical remarriage (implying one wife only)
- 451AD : Council of Chalcedon prohibits bishops from second marriage
- 1000AD : Rabbeinu Gershom bans polygamy in Jewish communities (to reduce strife)[5]
- 1847AD : LDS Church publicly announces polygamy (later renounced, 1890)
- 1900s : Global decline of polygamy; modern churches teach one-spouse marriage (emphasizing fidelity)

This timeline reflects the continuity: biblical polygamy (legitimate) and Christian monogamy (denounced), demonstrating at which points the church or the state shifted towards the prohibition of having more than one wife.

The above evidence cannot refute the thesis: the marriage teachings of Paul in the context imply rejection of polygamy, which is in line with Church tradition. Leadership conventions (one-household priests) were probably useful to an expedient end (stable congregations). Although there are opponents of this view, including Peter Rambo (2020), who expect a polygynist reading of Paul, most scholarly opinion (as embodied by the present argument) holds that any polygynist reading contradicts both grammar and cultural context[14][4].

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