

## An answer to a question posed CONCERNING DEACONESSES and DEACONS

By Greg Lundstedt 3/2009

First of all, we do not appoint or ordain women to hold any position of authority over men or allow women to teach men. Paul makes this clear to Timothy: <sup>11</sup> *Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.* <sup>12</sup> *But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.* (1Timothy 2:11-12.)

I gather from your inquiry, we might have a different view of what the Scripture reveals concerning deacons. As you probably know, the word *diakonos* simply means "servant" or "helper." Nowhere in Scripture are deacons mentioned as those who have authority in teaching or doctrine. Deacons are simply recognized faithful servants who meet godly character qualifications (1Tim. 3) consistent with one who is continually "holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience". (1Tim. 3:9)

Now concerning women who are recognized as those who faithfully serve as servants (*deakoneo*), there are two passages that support women in the biblical role of deaconess, i.e. as a servant (as described above), not as in a twisted view that gives deacons authority or position as leaders.

First, I believe honest and accurate exegetical work in 1 Tim. 3:1-13 supports men alone in the role of elder and men and women in the role of deacon. In 1Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, Paul gives the qualifications for elders. An open and obvious reading of these texts reveal this office is for men and not women. In the Greek text all the references to "elder" are masculine in gender. One who would justify women eldership must ignore the plain teaching of the text.

But in 1 Tim. 3:8-12 we have a change. In verse 11 Paul writes, *"Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things."* Many have interpreted this verse to be speaking of the wives of the deacons. This is possible, yet is not absolute. The word used translated "wives," *gunaikos* (*gune*) is equally translated "women" in many contexts. Indeed earlier in 1 Tim. Paul uses this word to clearly mean "women" in 2:9, 2:10, 2:11, 2:12, 2:14.

It is true that this word "women" here can mean the "wives" of the male deacons, but I do not take it that way and I believe there is a powerful argument to support my view. Namely, there is no corresponding treatment of the wives of elders in the preceding connected passage. Is Paul only concerned about the way the wives of deacons behave and not the wives of elders? We believe Paul is clearly addressing the behavior of those who would serve in these positions. If Paul was concerned about how the wives of the deacons behaved, he would have been certainly been concerned about the way the wives of the elders behaved, but he does not say anything about them. Since Paul doesn't address the wives of elders, it makes exegetical sense to see *gunaikos* as referring to women, i.e. women deacons.

Also in 3:11 Paul; uses the adverb *hosautos*, "likewise," associating those who he is speaking of in 3:11 (*gunaikos*) with those he has just spoken of in 3:8-10. I. just as men spoken of in 8-10 are to be godly, likewise so are the women spoken of in verse 11. Paul uses this same formula ("likewise" 3:8) to transition from the portion on elders 3:1-7 to the portion on deacons 3:8-12.

Now in Romans 16 we have a clear reference to women deacons. Paul states in his concluding remarks in Romans,

*"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (diakonon) of the church which is at Cenchrea; <sup>2</sup> that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well." (Romans 16:1-2)*

In this passage Paul clearly states that Phoebe is a *diakonon*, this is the female form of *diakonos*. And what is a *diakonos* or *diakonon*? A servant.

Now for those who would say Paul is simply saying she serves and is not a recognized servant (a deacon), have to deal with Paul's clear language. He says literally concerning Pheobe "being a *diakonon* of the church in Cenchrea" Paul is calling upon the church at Rome to make sure those in Rome will "*receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you.*" Why? Because she is a "*diakonon* of the church in Cenchrea." She is a recognized servant (a deacon) of the church in Cenchrea. Indeed Paul points out that she has been recognized as a servant..."for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well."

All this being said, if you have a biblical interpretation of what a deacon is, then you will be protected from misinterpreting 1Tim. 3 in a reactionary way.

If you understand that deacons are not leaders, that they have no authority, but that deacons are simply recognized faithful servants who meet godly character qualifications then what I believe is a biblical interpretation of 1Tim. 3 does not allow for women in leadership, but in the simple role as a deaconess.

## Qualifications for Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-13

8 **Deacons**

**likewise**

**must be**

men of **dignity**,

not

**double-tongued**, or  
**addicted to much wine** or  
fond of sordid gain,

9 **but**

holding to the mystery

**of the faith**

with a clear conscience.

10 And **let these**

**also**

**first be tested;**

then

let them serve as deacons

if they are **beyond reproach**.

11 **Women must**

**Likewise**

be **dignified**,

not **malicious gossips**,

**but**

**temperate**,

**faithful**

in all things.

12 **Let deacons be**

husbands of only one wife, and

good managers

of their children and

their own households.

13 For

**those who have served**

**well**

**as deacons**

obtain

for themselves  
a high standing and  
great confidence

**in the faith**

that is in Christ Jesus.