

## **Qualifications of Deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13; NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, <sup>9</sup> holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. <sup>10</sup> But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. <sup>11</sup> Likewise, *their wives must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. <sup>13</sup> For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1. Reverent
2. Honest and up-front
3. Temperate
4. Not covetous
5. Tested in the Faith
6. Wives who are of good Christian testimony
7. Male (literally: one women sort of men)
8. Good household managers

## **The Office of New Testament Deacon: a “one woman sort of man”**

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There is much confusion in the church today with regard to gender roles. Such confusion arises primarily out of a lack of satisfaction amongst some women with their God-given gifts and roles in their families and churches. The church should be a macrocosm of the family unit in which the husband is in the place of benevolent authority and the wife in the place of willing humble submission to that authority (Eph 5:22-33). A church that governs itself in a manner inconsistent with God’s design of the family unit is prone to confusion and sets an example contrary to Scripture. After all, the church is the ‘family of God’ in the sense that we love one another and call each other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Deacon is one of two offices in the church, the other being Elder (1 Tim 3:1-13). The New Testament Deacon differs in function from the New Testament Elder in that he is more focused on practical needs of the assembly and it is not required that he have the special gift of teaching. There are two passages in the New Testament that deal indirectly and directly with the office of Deacon (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim 3:8-12). The Acts passage is descriptive of the way in which major ministry assignments were made requiring authority over the entire church, but it cannot be proven that these men were instituted to the formal office of Deacon as such. While the Greek word and its variants for diakonos appear over 100 times in the New Testament, it is only on

two occasions (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-12) that we have the Office of Deacon spoken of. In the Acts passage, seven men are selected. The Greek word for men is andros, which can only refer to males—and not anthropos, which can refer to men or women. From this passage it is clear that only men were to be considered to be “appointed.” In 1 Timothy 3:12, we are told that Deacons (remember, office is in view here) are to be (Greek) “mias gunaikops andra”, or ‘one woman sort of men’ (Wuest). This is the same construction that we find for Elders in verse 2 of the same chapter. Further, we find that these andra (used only of male gender) are to rule their children and households well. It is clearly affirmed here that men are to be in the position of authority within the family, and by extension the church of God.

We will now look at four common objections made by those who would set up an office of deaconess. The first is based on 1 Timothy 3:11, which is often taken completely out of context and said to refer to ‘woman deacons’. However, the phrase “their wives” refers to the wives of the “deacons” mentioned in the previous verse. The idea here is that if a Deacon is married, the support he gets or does not get will make him or break him. Fortunately this author has been blessed with a ‘make him’ kind of wife which allowed me to serve well in the Office of Deacon for a number of years. Remember the axiom that ‘a Bible text taken out of context is a pretext’ that will lead to wrong doctrinal understanding. The second is that some say that Phoebe served in the office of deaconess according to Romans 16:1-2. However, we have no language of appointment here—and that is the determinative factor in deciding whether an appointed office is in view. Therefore, rendering diakona as (female) servant as its root was translated in 100 other places is the more accurate translation. Further, Phoebe’s reception by the church in Rome was to not to be on the basis of formal office but “in a manner worthy of the saints”. While Phoebe was indeed a great servant of God, she did not hold an official office. The third objection is that there were deaconesses in the early church in various congregations. This does not, however, give the practice a mandate. The church throughout all ages has violated biblical guidelines and precepts, and this point is no exception. Such an office was and is in violation of Scripture, which is our objective authority on all matters of Christian faith, doctrine, and practice. The fourth objection we will examine is the idea that since deacons are not teaching, there would be no prohibition against women entering the office. However, the New Testament Deacon is in a position of authority and leadership in terms of governance within the church—if not in practice, certainly in perception. Such authority being given to a woman is a direct violation of 1 Timothy 2:12.

We conclude then that there is no biblical mandate for an office of deaconess. The Office of Deacon like that of Elder is exclusive to men. This is not the order of men but the order of God. Women can and should serve in all other areas of the

church according to their spiritual gifts. Such areas include visitation, teaching other women, teaching children, and using their artistic gifts to further the cause of Christ. In setting up a Women's Service Ministry, it would be best to call it just that. It is my conviction, based on the aforementioned Scriptural grounds, that setting up such a ministry and calling it a Deaconess Board, even if its activities were expressly not to include church authority and teaching functions, would be misleading and may serve to foment and encourage pride and rebellion based on gender roles not only within the local church but also within its families.