

# A Biblical Theology of Deacons

## VI: Deacons: Certainly men, but also women?

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### Perspectives

#### The Bible Texts:

1 Timothy 3:8-13

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Romans 16:1-2

#### The Question & Answers:

- Paul mentions a new group, the γυναῖκας, in 1 Timothy 3:11. The Greek word *gynē* (γυνή) can refer to either a “woman” or a “wife”. **Which referent did Paul have in mind?**
- Christians hold four biblically viable views:
  - Wives of deacons (∴ male-only deacons)
  - Female-deacons (women, coequal with men, who hold the office of Deacon)
  - Deaconess (a third office filled by women)
  - Female-Assistants to the male-Deacons

#### The Hermeneutical Issues

- Context
  - Broader context: 1 Timothy 1-5, especially ch. 2
  - Immediate context: 1 Timothy 3:1-13
  - The text: Paul’s flow of argument in 1 Timothy 3:8-13
- Grammatical
  - What did Paul mean by *γυναϊκας*?
  - What did Paul mean by “likewise”?
  - What did Paul mean by *διακονος* and *διακονεω*?
  - What is the gender of the qualification words?
- Historical
  - What was happening in Ephesus, where Timothy was?

### Prior Context: 1 Timothy 2

1 Timothy 2:8-15 “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; 9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. 11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”

- Observations:
  - Limits women from (1) teaching and (2) exercising authority over men
  - Are deacons required to teach?
    - Deacons are not required to teach (Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; contra 1 Tim 3:9).
  - Does the role of the *diakonos* (3:8) or *gunaikas* (wives/women in 3:11) involve authority?

	Male-only	Pro Female
<b>Teaching</b>	In theory, women could be “deacons”	<i>gunaikas</i> are not required to teach as a <i>deacon</i>
<b>Authority</b>	(1) Deacons are 1 of 2 formal offices. Though they serve, it is hard to imagine the office does not hold some degree of authority  (2) As assistants to elders, they have <i>delegated</i> authority	Deacons are <i>servants</i> , not leaders  The <i>gunaikas</i> do not exercise leadership authority over men
	∴ female “deacons” would violate 1 Tim 2:12	∴ female “deacons” don’t violate 1 Tim 2:12

### Context: Use of *gunē* in 1 Timothy

- How did Paul use *gunē* in 1 Timothy?
  - Nine uses in 1 Timothy (2:9, 10, 11, 12, 14; 3:2, 11, 12; 5:9)

	Male only	Pro Female
<b>Ch. 2</b>	<i>gunē</i> do refer to women - yet <i>gunē</i> in relationship to men - 2:14 <i>gunē</i> is also Adam's <i>wife</i>	<i>gunē</i> is undisputedly used for "women"
<b>Ch. 3 &amp; 5</b>	The immediate context uses <i>gunē</i> for "wife" - See also 5:9, which refers to wives	<i>gunē</i> literally means "one-woman man", not "one-wife man"
<b>3:12</b>	Paul is not ambivalent in 3:12: <i>diakonos</i> refers to men and <i>gunē</i> refers to "wife"  (1) 3:12 prohibits female Deacons  (2) <i>gunaikas</i> in 3:11, like 3:12, refers to wives	Understood as "faithfulness" in marriage, whether male or female <i>diakonos</i>

- Are there any clarifying modifiers in 3:11?

	Male-only	Pro Female
<b>No definite article "the"</b>	If Paul meant "women" officeholders, he would have been unambiguous had he used the feminine article ( <i>tas</i> ) with <i>diakonos</i> , but he did not	<i>gunaikas</i> in 3:11 is just like and in parallel to <i>diakonos</i> in 3:8  ∴ like <i>diakonos</i> , <i>gunaikas</i> is also an office
<b>No possessive article "their"</b>	(1) A possessive is not necessary to understand <i>gunaikas</i> as "wives"  (2) There are contextual reasons that "their" is implied (see 3:12)	(1) The possessive is not in the original  (2) Possessives were available to Paul
<b>Lack of clarifying term</b>	Paul used <i>gunaikas</i> , an ambiguous and unspecific term (versus specific terms like <i>episkopos</i> and <i>diakonos</i> ).	<i>γυναίκας</i> refers to more <b>generic</b> "women" rather than "wives"  <i>In context</i> , these "women" are officeholders
	The lack of modifiers or specific terms makes context necessary to determine who the <i>gunaikas</i> are. In context, they are women in relationship to the male <i>diakonos</i> , or "wives".	

**Immediate Context: 1 Timothy 3:1-13**

- Paul addressed the Overseer first (3:1-7), then Deacons (3:8-13)
- *What is the relationship of the episkopos, diakonos, and gunaikas to each other?*

- Grammatical & conceptual structure:

3:2 “ <i>episkopos</i> (Overseer)		<i>to be</i> ...[qualifications]”
3:8 “ <i>diakonos</i> (Deacon)	likewise	[ <i>to be</i> ]...[qualifications]”
3:11 “ <i>gunaikas</i> (women/wives?)	likewise	[ <i>to be</i> ]...[qualifications]”
3:12 “Let <i>diakonos</i> (Deacon)		be...[qualifications]

	Male only	Pro Female
<b>Structure</b>	Grammatical parallels don’t require the introduction of a new office in 3:11	See grammatical parallels across three offices
<b>Likewise</b>	Does not require a new office in 3:11 (see “likewise” in 2:8,9)  Focus is on similar <b>moral character</b>	Introduces a new office in 3:8 and 11  Focus is on three parallel <b>offices</b>
<b>Titles</b>	<i>episkopos</i> and <i>diakonos</i> are <b>specific</b> terms for titles; whereas <i>gunaikas</i> is not	See conceptual parallels across three offices
	<i>diakonos</i> are linked to <i>episkopos</i> ; while <i>gunaikas</i> are linked to <i>diakonos</i>	Both <i>diakonos</i> and <i>gunaikas</i> are linked to the <i>episkopos</i>

- *What do we make of the absence of women/wives in Overseer section?*

Male only	Pro Female
Overseer’s wife does not shepherd (teach or exercise authority, contra 1 Tim 2:12) ...but... Deacon’s wife might serve alongside	- If <i>gunaikas</i> are “wives”, then there appear to be <b>stricter</b> qualifications for Deacons, than for Overseers; ∴ <i>gunaikas</i> are “women”



## Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2

Male-Deacons	Pro Female
(1) Teaching passages interpret descriptive passages (2) <i>diakonos</i> can refer to male or female persons	Paul describes Phoebe, a woman, as a <i>diakonos</i> (1) Descriptive (2) Grammar mismatch
(1) Women in the NT “deacon” meals and domestic-service (2) Patrons are not necessarily <i>diakonos</i> (3) Phoebe was likely a “courier” <i>diakonos</i>	Paul ascribes tasks to Phoebe, a female “ <i>diakonos</i> ,” suggesting she was a church officeholder (1) Phoebe was a patron
(1) The office of <i>diakonos</i> describes assistants to the elders, not the church. <i>diakonos</i> describes her <b>character</b> as a servant. (2) Those who are “generically” described as “servants/ministers” to the Lord were male ministry partners of Paul, heralds and preachers of the gospel	(2) Phoebe was a distinguished sister of the church in Cenchreae (1) Official work for a specific church (2) Her “ <i>diakonos</i> -ing” was not described generically as “unto the Lord”

1 Tim 3:11 - The qualifications of the deacons' wives (*gunaikas*)

1. Dignified
2. Not a slanderer
3. Sober minded
4. Faithful in all things