

1 TIMOTHY 3:11
WOMEN, WOMEN DEACONS, DEACONESSSES, HELPERS, OR WIVES?
BY ALEXANDER STRAUCH
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I began the book *Paul's Vision for the Deacons: Assisting the Elders with the Care of God's Church* with the Berean Challenge: "They [the Bereans] received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed" (Acts 17:11–12).

This detailed study of 1 Timothy 3:11 will require Berean-like motivation and thinking skills for understanding the reasons for and against the different views of 1 Timothy 3:11.

[*Gynaikas*] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Most likely the Bereans examined the Scriptures together as a group to evaluate if Paul's claims about Jesus the Messiah were true. It might help if you examine the arguments of the various interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:11 together with other Berean-like students of Scripture.

The question we will seek to answer is this: Who are the women Paul writes about in 1 Timothy 3:11? The five views we will examine are:

- 1) All Christian women in general
- 2) Women deacons (coequals with male deacons)
- 3) Deaconesses (a third, separate office)
- 4) Women helpers, or assistants to the deacons
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Gynē—“woman,” or “wife” (the singular; pronounced goo-NAY).

Gynaikes—“women,” or “wives” (the nominative plural; pronounced goo-NAI-kes).

Gynaikas—“women,” or “wives” (v. 11; the accusative plural of *gynē*; pronounced goo-NAI-kas).

I. Christian Women in General

According to this view, Paul interjects into his list of qualifications for male deacons four character requirements for the women of the church at Ephesus.¹ The Greek word *gynē* (or the plural *gynaikes*) means woman and/or wife. Only the context indicates if the term means woman or wife. Advocates of this view assert that there is no indication in the context that *gynaikas* means wives. They also claim that it is not without precedent for Paul to interrupt his flow of thought with a completely unrelated idea (1 Cor. 1:16; 1 Tim. 5:23).

Evaluation of the Women-in-General View

It is highly unlikely that in the midst of listing the qualifications for male church officeholders—overseers and deacons—that Paul would so abruptly insert qualifications for all Christian women in general. Since Paul had already addressed men and women in the Christian assembly in 1 Timothy 2:8–15, this would have been a puzzling interruption of an otherwise orderly section of his letter (1 Tim. 2:1–3:16). In addition, the examples given of Paul’s so-called unrelated interruptions of thought are not unrelated ideas at all (read 1 Timothy 5:23 in light of the statement in verse 22, “keep yourself pure”).

Furthermore, the phrase, “[*gynaikas*] likewise must be,” requires that these women be related in some way to the “deacons likewise must be” of verse 8. The interpretation that “women” in a generic sense is meant does not fit the flow of the grammatical structure of the passage, which is further explained below under the discussion of women deacons.

Proponents of the all-Christian-women view emphasize the fact that there is no definite article (“the”) before the plural noun *gynaikas*. They insist that the absence of the article demonstrates grammatically that these women are distinct from the deacons and represent all women as a class of persons. In considering this grammatical point, we should not overlook the fact that the advocates of the other views also claim the absence of the article with *gynaikas* promotes their positions. It is not always so clear what the absence of the article is meant to suggest.

This first view is almost universally rejected by Bible commentators and scholars because it does not fit the overall grammatical structure and content of the passage (see below). Moreover, there are better interpretations of the passage, to which we now turn.

One final note: Although a number of English Bibles translate the Greek word *gynaikas* in verse 11 as “women,”² this rendering of *gynaikas* is ambiguous and could be misleading (e.g., women generically). Since Paul did not provide a qualifying word or modifying phrase to identify these women, some translators or commentators add a word or phrase to help identify the *gynaikas*. And, in fairness, a footnote identifying alternative interpretations of *gynaikas* should always be added. For example, the *New International Version* (2011) translates *gynaikas* in verse 11 as “women,” but adds the footnote, “possibly deacons’ wives, or women who are deacons.”

II. Women Deacons (Coequal with Male Deacons)

This view categorically states that the women referred to in verse 11 are women who hold the office of deacon. They are equal with the male deacon officeholders, both serving together as full-fledged deacons.³ The *Revised English Bible* (REB), for example, translates verse 11 as “women in this office must likewise be.” The words “in this office” are added by the translators, and are not in the Greek text.

Also, they insist that we should *not* call these women *deaconesses*, because the term *deaconess* is often used to mean a separate group, a third office, that is subordinate to the male deacons.⁴ They should be called “deacons.”

To help bring clarity and consistency to this subject, the term *woman deacon* is used in this study to describe this second view, and the term *deaconess* is used to describe the third view. This should help to avoid confusing these two different interpretations. But be aware that some commentators and church leaders use the term *deaconesses* to mean *women deacons*, while others use *deaconesses* to mean a third office of woman deacons serving under the male deacons or elders.

Arguments for Women Deacons

1. The Content and Grammatical Structure of the Passage

Proponents of the women-deacons view contend that the content and grammatical structure of the passage require that the women be officeholders on an equal standing with the male deacon officeholders.

Verse 11 is introduced by the adverb “likewise,” which parallels the adverb “likewise” in verse 8, “deacons likewise must be.” The words “must be” in verses 8 and 11 are appropriately supplied from verse 2, connecting this entire passage grammatically and conceptually:

Verse 2: Therefore an overseer must be (*dei . . . einai*) above reproach.⁵

Verse 8: Deacons likewise [must be] dignified; (“must be” is supplied from verse 2).

Verse 11: *Gynaikas* likewise [must be] dignified; (“must be” is supplied from verse 2).

According to this interpretation, the introductory adverb “likewise,” and the dependence of verses 8 and 11 on the words “must be” from verse 2, signals that three distinct groups of officeholders are addressed. So, when the designation *gynaikas* appears in verse 11, although there is no modifying word, phrase, or article attached, they argue that the context and the grammatical structure of the passage require that these women are women officeholders like the male officeholders.

2. The Parallel Qualifications of Verse 11

The claim is made that the qualifications for the women in verse 11 parallel the male deacons’

qualifications in verses 8–9. Some assert that verse 11 is an “abbreviated mirror of 3:8–9”:⁶

v. 11 and v. 8	“dignified” parallels “dignified”
v. 11 and v. 8	“not slanderers” parallels “not double-tongued”
v. 11 and v. 8	“sober-minded” parallels “not addicted to much wine”
v. 11 and v. 8	no parallel in verse 11 exists for “not greedy for dishonest gain”
v. 11 and v. 9	“faithful in all things” parallels “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” or possibly, “not greedy for dishonest gain” (v. 8)

It appears that the women in verse 11 must substantially meet the same qualifications as the male deacons in verses 8–9. This suggests to some that the women in verse 11 are the same as the male deacons of verses 8–9.

3. The Absence of the Article and/or Possessive Pronoun “Their” with *Gynaikas*

The use of *gynaikas* (women/wives) without the article (“the”) is believed to be another syntactical feature in favor of the interpretation of women deacons. In grammatical terms, a noun without an article is referred to as an anarthrous noun. The anarthrous use of *gynaikas*, then, is meant

to specify the female counterpart, or equivalent, of a male exercising a given occupation or status. In this usage *gynē* occurs in apposition to a more specific noun [in this case *diakonous*].⁷

Thus, it is contended that the absence of the article demonstrates that these women are co-workers and equal partners with the male deacons in their occupation, work, and position.

Barry Blackburn sees the absence of the definite article, or of the possessive pronoun, as a key factor against *gynaikas* being wives. In short, he lists only four occurrences of *gynē* without the article, but, in each case, *gynē* is in the singular, and the context makes perfectly clear that *gynē* is a wife (Mark 10:2; 12:19 (=Luke 20:28); Luke 18:29; 1 Cor. 7:11). Thus, he argues that the absence of the article makes it “improbable”⁸ that these women are wives.

If Paul was referring to deacons’ wives, why did he omit the possessive pronoun *their* (*autōn*), or the definite article (*tas*), or both the definite article and pronoun? If he had written “their *gynaikas*” (*tas gynaikas autōn*), we would know with certainty that the women were the deacons’ wives. The ESV and other translations add the word “their” to *gynaikas*, but “their” is not part of the original Greek text.

4. Phoebe, a *Diakonos*

Many scholars cite Phoebe as an example of a woman deacon: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom. 16:1). The *New International Version* (2011) and *New Revised Standard Version* translate *diakonos* in verse 1 as “deacon.” So those who believe that 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to women deacons find specific confirmation for their view here.

Arguments Against Women Deacons

Most of the criticisms I will present here on women deacons apply to the two following views, deaconesses and women helpers. So, it is necessary that you understand these arguments well before moving on to the next two interpretations, and even to the final viewpoint, which is, the wives of deacons. This will allow me not to have to repeat these arguments too many times, and bore you to death.

1. Women Assistants to the Overseers and the Prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:8–15

As argued in Chapter 3 of *Paul's Vision for the Deacons*, based on the newest lexical research of the term *diakonos*, we should translate *diakonoi* in 1 Timothy 3:8 not as “deacons” or “servants,” but as “assistants.” The view is built on more objective linguistic and contextual evidence than the undefined, leading-servant or table-serving views (see *BDAG*, pp.230-231).

This translation tells us immediately the role of the *diakonoi* and fits well with the preceding context regarding the overseers (*episkopoi*). These officials are designated *diakonoi*, “assistants,” because of their close and dependent relationship with the *episkopoi*. Paul most likely intended this special usage of the Greek word *diakonos* because, as Clarence Agan III succinctly and correctly explains, the term:

better captures the intermediary function Paul had in mind. He was thinking of a role that involved being simultaneously in-and-under authority—under the authority of the elders, but having authority over the congregation to carry out tasks as needed. *Diakonos* provided a clear way to say this while still leaving room for flexibility as to the nature of the specific tasks deacons might undertake.⁹

The use of *diakonos* in this sense indicates one who carries out the will of another, such as a subordinate carrying out the assignment of a superior. The usage also indicates that the subordinate has full authority to execute the superior's delegated task. So, as church officeholders and assistants to the overseers/elders, deacons exercise authority and supervision within the congregation as delegated representatives/agents of the overseers/elders. Our view of the function and role of the deacon (= assistant) will be a significant factor in our understanding of the *gynaikes* of 1 Timothy 3:11.

If the “women” of verse 11 are understood as formal assistants to the overseers, then an obvious problem exists. The idea of women assistants to the overseers/elders conflicts with the preceding context of 1 Timothy 2:8–3:7, particularly verse 12: “I do not permit a woman [*gynē*] to teach or to exercise authority over a man”:¹⁰

I desire . . . likewise also that women [*gynaikas*] should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, . . . [and] with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. . . . I do not permit a woman [*gynē*] to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman [*gynē*] was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Tim. 2:8–10, 12–14)

1 Timothy 2:8–13 is part of the overall context beginning in 2:1 and ending in 3:16. Paul's instructions regarding Christian men and women in the gathered assembly (vv. 8–12) are intimately connected to and govern his instructions for the overseers and deacons of 3:1–13.

Paul is very serious—far more than many seem to understand—about the proper roles the Creator has assigned to godly men and women in the family and church (see 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 14:33–38; Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; Titus 2:4; see too Acts 6:3, 5). The angels are watching Paul says (1 Cor. 11:10)!

In light of Paul's explicit restrictions in 1 Timothy 2:9–14, it is doubtful that the women of 1 Timothy 3:11 are women assistants in the sense of being equal partners with the male assistants to the overseers/elders. (If the women of verse 11 are women assistants, the most accurate understanding of them is that they are full-fledged assistants, and not women helpers in some general sense, or deaconesses, a third, separate office, or assistants to the male deacons, or unmarried women helping widows. All these views are speculative.)

Simply Servants, Not Assistants

Churches that believe that the women in verse 11 are women deacons or deaconesses also believe that deacons (male and female) are simply servants of the church, authorized by the church to serve the congregation in special ways. They claim (without much evidence) that deacons are “model servants,” or “leading servants,” or “gifted servants.” Thus, they would contend, and correctly so, that 1 Timothy 2:12 does not apply to women deacons because they do not conduct the teaching of the church and are not official assistants to the elders exercising authority over the congregation. But as I have argued, deacons are not simply model or leading servants, but actually official assistants to the pastor elders, working in close association with the elders, and authorized by them to be their agents within the congregation to help care for the church.

2. Paul's Odd Choice of the Designation *Gynē*

Another reason—and it is a significant one—for viewing the women of verse 11 as the wives of the deacons and not deacons is Paul's very choice of the word *gynē* (the plural is *gynaikes* and can mean either women or wives depending on the context) rather than a specific title, e.g., *women deacons* (*gynaikes diakonoi*). If these women are deacons (= assistants), calling them *gynaikas* is an odd, ambiguous, and even inconsistent way to refer to church officials.

In verses 2 and 8, Paul gave specific titles to the two officeholders, overseer (*episkopos*) and assistants (*diakonoi*). But for the women in verse 11, he chose the general designation *gynaikas* (women/wives) without any modifying word or phrase to explain clearly their relationship to the male deacons.

Patrick Fairbairn, a Scottish theologian and commentator who defends the view of women deacons, honestly admits that this is difficult to explain:

It still is somewhat strange, however, that the general term *women* (*gynaikas*) is employed, and not the specific *deaconesses* (*tas diakonous*), which would have excluded all uncertainty as to the meaning.¹¹

In the Greek language of the New Testament, there was no distinct feminine form of *diakonos*,

such as *diakonē*. The Greek noun *diakonos*, although appearing masculine in its inflection pattern, is among a number of second declension nouns that can be either masculine or feminine. Thus, the masculine inflection pattern can also be a noun in the feminine gender, and can apply to women.

a. A Woman *Diakonos*

In Romans 16:1 Paul referred to a woman named Phoebe as *diakonos*: The *New International Version* (2011) renders *diakonos* as “deacon”: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.” The *English Standard Version* (ESV), as well as many other translations, however, translate the Greek word *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 as “servant.”¹²

If, for the sake of argument, we suppose that Phoebe was a deacon, then Paul was not reluctant to use the term *diakonos* for a woman deacon. So, if Paul was singling out women deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11, why would he use the ambiguous and general word *gynaikas* and not *diakonous* with the feminine article—*tas diakonous* (“female deacons”), or *gynaikas diakonous* (“women deacons”)? *Although some commentators repeatedly state that Paul had no terminology to express women deacons and, therefore, had to use the general word gynē (woman/wife), this is simply not true.*

The fact is, 160 years later (AD 230) in the original Greek manuscript of the well-known church order manual, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (= “Teaching of the Apostles), the compiler could identify the female deacon by attaching the feminine article to *diakonos* (*hē diakonos*) and also by citing “woman deacons” (*gynaikes diakonoi*).¹³

b. *Diakonoī*, Men and Women

Since the inflectional pattern of *diakonos* can be either masculine or feminine in gender, it can refer to women as well as to men. Thus, although the *diakonoī* of verses 8–9 could include men and women deacons, the insertion of *gynaikas* in verse 11 strongly implies that Paul is referring only to male deacons in verses 8–9.

If the women are deacons like the male deacons, it would have been unnecessary for Paul to insert verse 11, which (again, according to the proponents of women deacons) states qualifications similar to (or the same as) those of verses 8 and 9. But there is nothing particularly gender specific about the qualifications listed in verse 11. If Paul was singling out women deacons for special mention, we might expect him to add some uniquely important qualifications for women deacons such as “the wife of one husband.” But that is not the case.

3. The Absence of the Marital Qualification

If Paul was listing the qualifications for women deacons, it is surprising that he omitted any direct instruction about their marital qualification.

A faithful marital reputation was a matter of considerable importance to Paul. In the qualifications for elders and male deacons, Paul was emphatic: They must each be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Moreover, Paul required that even a church-supported widow be “the wife of one husband” (1 Tim. 5:9).

But in verse 11, no direct instruction is given regarding the marital faithfulness of the

women, such as “the wife of one husband.” No parallel marital qualification is made to match the male deacon’s qualification (v. 12). Furthermore, no requirements are listed about their children or family life as required of the elders, male deacons, and dependent widows. It is difficult to conceive that Paul would require elders, male deacons, and dependent widows to meet the all-important qualification of marital faithfulness, but not women deacons.

To be fair, it is possible that the woman’s marital and family qualifications are covered under the general qualification, “faithful in all things” (v. 11).

4. Clarifying “*Gynaikas* Likewise Must Be”

The introductory adverb “likewise” means “similarly,” or “in the same way.” It introduces a new, distinct group of individuals (*gynaikas*, women/wives) who are compared with the previous group, that is, the male *diakonoi*. The women are distinct from the male deacons, yet closely related and must be, like the male deacons, “dignified.”

Some Bible students understand this to suggest that Paul was referring to women officeholders in verse 11. So, when the designation *gynaikas* appears, although there are no modifying words, they argue that the context and the grammatical structure of the passage require the interpretation that these women be officeholders like the deacons. This is possible.

The phrase “[*gynaikas*] likewise must be” does not, however, require that the women in verse 11 be church officeholders equal to the deacons of verses 8–10. There are other options.

For example: In his commentary on the Greek text of the Pastoral Epistles, George Knight contends that the best reading of the structural and difficult syntactical evidence of the passage is that the women are the deacons’ wives who officially assist their deacon husbands with the care of the church’s widows and other needy women.¹⁴ This is why no specific, official title is assigned to these women.

Others propose that the women are women helpers who assist the deacons in some way without having an official title, and that would explain why they are not called “deacons”; they had no official title. Yet others contend that these women form a third office that consists of women who help other women under the deacons’ supervision.

The grammatical construction of the passage (vv. 2, 8, 11), especially the second use of “likewise” (v. 11), can be used to defend any of the other views presented in this study. It does not demand that the women be equally considered women deacons. However the adverb “likewise” is used to argue for a particular view, it still does not clearly identify the *gynaikes*.

5. Dealing with the Anarthrous Use of *Gynaikas*

The absence of the article (*tas*) before *gynaikas* or the possessive pronoun “their” (*autōn*) is a point in strong favor of women officeholders or official helpers to the deacons.

A similar issue occurs with the use of the title *diakonoi* in verse 8. No definite article or possessive pronoun is attached to *diakonoi*. It is anarthrous (without the article). If Paul had added the possessive pronoun “their” to *diakonoi*, we would know with certainty that the *diakonoi* were the overseers’ assistants. But Paul did not add a definite article, possessive pronoun, or modifying phrase, such as, “of the poor” or “of the church.” It is the *diakonoi*’s close association with the overseers, their character qualities similar to those of the overseers,

and the possible meaning of *diakonoi* as assistants that identify the *diakonoi* as the overseers' assistants.

Because of the personal and urgent nature of the letter of 1 Timothy, Timothy knew exactly who the overseers, assistants, and women were. Paul was not trying to define who these individuals were. Rather, he was spelling out their qualifications. Thus, Paul was not required by some grammatical rule to add the qualifier "their." Who these *diakonoi* and *gynaikes* were was plainly obvious to Timothy and the congregation. Although the possessive pronoun or article would be most helpful to us, it was not absolutely necessary. Furthermore, it is not always so certain why an article is omitted or included.

These unidentified women without a title appearing in the middle of a passage on male deacons and their required examination and qualifications for office, suggests those in closest relationship to the male deacons, "wives," not some unidentified office-bearers.

In the end, it is easier to understand the omission of the pronoun "their" than it is to explain why Paul used the general term *gynaikas* ("women/wives") instead of a specific term, *tas diakonous*, or *gynaikas diakonous* (women deacons).

6. Challenging the So-Called Parallel Qualifications of Verse 11

The four qualifications listed for the women in verse 11 are both similar and dissimilar to the male deacons' qualifications in verses 8–9. Some commentators view the four qualifications in verse 11 as being equivalent to the male deacons' qualifications in verses 8–9. They hold that this means verse 11 addresses women deacons or deaconesses.

Except for the term "dignified" used in verses 11 and 8, the other three qualifications in verse 11 are not equivalent in meaning to the three qualifications in verses 8 and 9:

- "Slanderer" is not the same as "double-tongued," although both address the problem of speech.
- "Sober-minded" is similar, but not equivalent to, "not addicted to much wine."
- "Faithful in all things" is not parallel to "hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."
- And there is no parallel qualification in verse 11 with "not greedy for dishonest gain" in verse 8.

Thus, the so-called parallelism between verses 8–9 and verse 11 does not prove that the women are deacons. In fact, the similarities and dissimilarities of qualifications between verses 8–9 and verse 11 could equally be viewed as evidence that these women are the wives of the deacons.

7. Phoebe's Identification as a *Diakonos*

As we have already noted, many students of Scripture believe Phoebe to be a woman deacon:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many, and of myself as well. (Rom. 16:1–2)

The problem here is that it is not clear what is meant by the phrase “a [*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchreae.” There are five suggested interpretations.

a. Phoebe a Deacon of the Church

Phoebe was an outstanding Christian woman. Paul spoke of her as a (1) “sister,” meaning a fellow believer, and (2) a “patron of many, and of myself as well.” Most commentators believe that Phoebe was a wealthy and influential “patron” of the Lord’s work at Cenchreae, which was only six miles from the well-known church in Corinth. Although the specific assistance she supplied is not known, she was considered to be a distinguished person within the church.

Paul also commended Phoebe as a “[*diakonos*] of the church.” Many interpreters take this to mean that Phoebe was a church officeholder, a deacon. Those who hold that 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to women deacons will naturally see in Phoebe confirmation for their view.

If Phoebe was a deacon, and the first deacon ever named, Paul must have assumed that by AD 57, when he wrote Romans, the Christians in Rome would understand his language to mean that Phoebe held the office of deacon. But in Rome and among the Western churches, women deacons, or deaconesses, did not appear till late in the fourth century.

In the highly influential church order manual, *Apostolic Tradition* (ca. AD 215), which was written from Rome by Hippolytus, all the various offices of the church in Rome were listed. Hippolytus spoke of overseers, elders, deacons, subdeacons, confessors, widows, lectors, virgins, healers, but *not* of female deacons.¹⁵ In his seminal study on deaconesses, Aimé Georges Martimort comments:

The ecclesiology of St. Hippolytus of Rome simply excluded the possibility of deaconesses, as did the ecclesiology proclaimed by Tertullian all his life as well.¹⁶

Cornelius (AD 251–53), Fabian’s successor in Rome as bishop/overseer, states in a letter that in Rome there were “forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons” and “above fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress, all of whom are supported by the grace and loving-kindness of the Master.”¹⁷ But there is no mention of deaconesses.¹⁸ If deaconesses existed in the first century in Rome, they quickly vanished from the pages of history. So, would the Christians in Rome have understood Paul to mean that Phoebe was a deacon?

I have contended that the term *diakonos*, as used by Paul in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3, means assistant or aide of the *episkopoi*. The *diakonoi* were intimately linked to the *episkopoi* for their identity and work of service to the church *as the formal agents of the overseers/elders*. Phoebe, however, is called “a servant of the church,” and not “an assistant to the overseers.” Again, we are back to the fundamental question of who is deacon? I have argued that they are to assistants to the overseers/elders, not simply servants of the church.

b. Phoebe a Deaconess of the Church

Others assert that Phoebe was a deaconess.¹⁹ But the text specifically calls Phoebe a *diakonos*, not a “deaconess” (*diakonissa*), a Greek term not found till the third century.

For those who believe Phoebe was a full-fledged deacon, calling her a “deaconess” is viewed as downgrading Phoebe’s position as a deacon. The term “deaconess” commonly implies an office or function that is separate from and of a far more limited role than that of a male deacon. The term “deaconess” makes a distinction between men and women that the term *diakonos* does not.

Furthermore, “deaconess” is not a New Testament term. Today’s general idea of a deaconess does not appear until about AD 230 in the church order manual called *Didaskalia Apostolorum*. Most English Bibles have correctly avoided using the term *deaconess*. For more about the concept of a deaconess, see below.

c. Phoebe a Minister of the Church

Some scholars argue that Phoebe was a preacher and leader of the church in Cenchreae. One writer boldly asserts that Phoebe was “acknowledged as a charismatic preacher and leader of the community in Cenchreae.”²⁰ Advocates of this view make their claims based on three Greek words in the passage: (1) *diakonos* as meaning a herald or preacher;²¹ (2) *adelphē* (“sister”) as implying Paul’s coworker in the gospel mission; and (3) *prostatis* (“patron”) as meaning both “minister and patroness of the community in Cenchreae.”²²

Phoebe was an influential and important woman in the church. She helped Paul and many others, but this does not imply that she was a preacher, teacher, or leader of the church. To hold that the terms *diakonos*, *adelphē*, and *prostatis* prove that Phoebe was “a charismatic preacher and leader of the community” is to impose on these Greek words meanings that are found in other contexts but not in the current context.²³

A more natural understanding of these terms is that Phoebe was a sister in Christ, an outstanding servant of (or deacon in) the church, and a generous patroness of the Lord’s work. This is how the vast majority of commentators and Bible translators have understood these terms. The interpretation that views Phoebe as a preacher or minister sounds more like wishful thinking and accommodation to the spirit of the modern age of egalitarianism.

d. Phoebe a Servant of the Church

Bible commentators who think that 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to the deacons’ wives normally hold that Paul was highly commending Phoebe to the believers in Rome by means of this unique phrase, “servant of the church in Cenchreae.”²⁴ Paul acknowledges her distinguished service to the local church, to many others, and to himself in particular: “For she has been a patron [*prostatis*]²⁵ of many and of myself as well” (Rom. 16:2). To be singled out as a servant of the church, even in an unofficial sense, would have been an honor (see 1 Cor. 16:15–16; Acts 16:14–15).

A person can be an influential, prominent member of a church without being an elder or deacon. So, Phoebe could have been called a servant of the church without necessarily being designated a deacon. Moreover, Paul did not customarily call an individual by a title—elder,

overseer, or deacon. Clearly, “[*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchreae” is an unusual Pauline phrase and a key reason for differing views on its meaning.

Since my conclusion is that the women Paul refers to in 1 Timothy 3:11 are deacons’ wives, his naming Phoebe a “[*diakonos*] of the church” most likely means that she was an outstanding servant of the church who was given an honorable designation for her devoted service. Or possibly, she was an official envoy of the church who carried information, and possibly Paul’s letter, to the Romans as explained below.

e. Phoebe a Representative or Delegate of the Church

Others contend that the usage of the word *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 is used in the sense of communication or delivery. The context deals with travel and communication. Phoebe was leaving Cenchreae to travel a long distance. She might have been traveling to Rome for personal or business reasons. Nevertheless, at the same time, she could serve as a representative or spokesperson of the churches in Cenchreae and Corinth.

At the time, such travel by believers between distant churches was a vitally important means of carrying information, messages, and greetings (Rom. 16:16). Phoebe would certainly have carried valuable information from Paul and the churches in Cenchreae and Corinth, and it is possible that she carried his magisterial letter which we know as “The Letter of Paul’s to the Romans.”

Also, Phoebe may have been charged with preparing the Christians in Rome for Paul’s coming visit to Rome on his way to preach the gospel in Spain (Rom. 15:17–24). These responsibilities would have made her, in effect, a representative of her church. Therefore, Paul described Phoebe as a *diakonos* in the sense of an “envoy” or “courier” who was delivering a message or some item on behalf of another.²⁶ Such usage of *diakonos* has been clearly demonstrated by both John Collins and Clarence Agan III (see pages 53-54 in *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons*; 2 Cor. 3:3; Eph. 3:7-9;)

Whether or not Phoebe was a deacon, a commendable servant, or an envoy of the church in Cenchreae is debatable. Hence, the question of women deacons will have to be solved primarily by Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 3:8–13, and not by Romans 16:1.

8. The Absence of Women Deacons in Early Post-Apostolic Literature

If Paul meant to address women deacons in the church at Ephesus, coequal with the male deacons, then they quickly disappeared from the pages of history. And when they did appear, they were not coequals with their male counterparts.

When female deacons unambiguously appeared during the third and fourth centuries, and their responsibilities were plainly described, they were not equal with the male deacons.

The first uncontested, concrete information on female deacons appears in the church order manual *Didascalia Apostolorum* (AD 230). Concerning the differences between male and female deacons in the *Didascalia*, Aimé Martimort concludes: “In no way could they be considered on the same level as male deacons: They were their auxiliaries.”²⁷

Martimort demonstrates through painstaking analysis of all available literature that:

During all the time when the institution of deaconesses was a living institution, both the discipline and the liturgy of the churches insisted upon a very clear distinction between deacons and deaconesses.²⁸

If the women of verse 11 were not full-fledged deacons, then who were these women in close association with the male deacons but having no specific title to clearly identify them? A third interpretation identifies these women as deaconesses.

III. Deaconesses

Many churches use the term *deaconesses* for identifying the women of 1 Timothy 3:11. Some speak of “the office of deaconesses.”²⁹ By the term *deaconess*, they commonly mean a third, separate group of church officials—distinguished from, but also similar to, the male deacons. Thus, 1 Timothy 3:1–13 addresses the qualifications for elders, deacons, and deaconesses.

In most cases, deaconesses are not full-fledged deacons and are not equal partners with the male deacons. They are an independent group of servants who primarily serve the women of the church. Arguing for the view of women deacons (the second view), Charles Deweese states plainly that:

some churches with deaconesses treat them equally with deacons. Other churches, however, and there are thousands of them, treat deaconesses separately from male deacons, view them as assistants to the deacons, deprive them of ordination (when it applies to deacons), prevent them from serving as deacon officers, and do not allow them to distribute the Lord’s Supper.³⁰

To advance women deacons as full-fledged deacons, Deweese strongly advises churches to “start calling deaconesses deacons.”³¹

Be aware that some writers use the terms *deaconesses* and *women deacons* interchangeably, which can be confusing. The different variations of this view are often poorly articulated, and frequently it is difficult to interpret what some of the commentators themselves mean by these terms. As one writer puts it: “It is at times as difficult to determine exactly what a given commentator has in mind as it is to discern the intent of the text upon which comment is made.”³²

Also, many commentators and church leaders who promote the view of deaconesses hold that deaconesses are official servants of the church body and not the formal assistants to the elders.

Evaluation of the Deaconesses View

Most of the criticisms I presented above regarding women deacons apply also to the view of deaconesses.

If verse 11 refers to deaconesses, why are they called *gynaiikes* and not given a distinctive title, as is done for the overseers (*episkopos*) and male deacons (*diakonos*)? I voiced this same criticism of women deacons earlier in this paper.

Also, if Paul is spelling out the qualifications for deaconesses, why is the all-important requirement of marital faithfulness omitted for deaconesses, as is demanded of elders, deacons,

and church-supported widows (see page 11). Paul offers no corresponding marital stipulation, such as “the wife of one husband,” to match the male deacon’s qualification, “the husband of one wife” (v. 12).

Furthermore, if there were deaconesses in the first churches of Ephesus and Cenchreae, it is remarkable that we do not see a clear record of the deaconesses and their prescribed duties in early post-apostolic *Christian* literature (e.g., Ignatius) for more than 150 years after the time of Paul. And when such records do appear, they are mostly in the eastern churches. Moreover, in Rome there is no evidence of deaconesses for hundreds of years after Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Pliny’s Letter to Trajan: There is a second-century letter, written in Latin, from Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, to the Roman Emperor Trajan (ca. AD 112), that some scholars claim demonstrates that women deacons existed early in the second century.

Explaining to the Emperor Trajan that he had tortured two Christian slave women in order to extract from them the truth of their beliefs, he writes:

I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves [Latin, *ancillis*], who were styled *deaconesses* [Latin, *ministrae*, servants]: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.³³

Like Phoebe in Romans 16:1, it is uncertain who these women were or what they meant by the term *ministrae* (Latin for servants), or what Pliny himself understood the slave women to mean by the term *ministrae*. Pliny admits to Trajan that he knows very little about the beliefs of Christianity. Moreover, the English translation *deaconesses* for the Latin term *ministrae*, rather than the more general word *servants*, is an anachronistic translation and misleading to the reader. The two slave women may have said that they were servants—meaning servants of the living God and his people—without being official deacons/assistants.

Another important fact to understand is that the Greek feminine term *diakonissa* (*deaconess*) is not a New Testament term. The first recorded instance of the Greek word *deaconess* (*diakonissa*) appears in the Canon 19 of the First Council of Nicaea (AD 325)³⁴ some 260 years after the letter of 1 Timothy was written.

In their translations of the New Testament, both Charles Williams and Richard Weymouth use the term *deaconesses* for rendering *gynaikas* in 1 Timothy 3:11. But this is quite misleading to the English reader who might think that their translation represents an actual Greek word for deaconess. The Greek word *diakonissa* (*deaconess*) does not appear in the text or any place else in the first century.

Paul certainly could have coined a new term like *deaconess* (*diakonissa*). He was not averse to coining new terms to fit the special needs of his churches.³⁵ If he had created the term *diakonissa* it would have been understood by his readers. But Paul did not do this. Instead, he calls the individuals mentioned in verse 11 by the general term *gynaikas* (women/wives).

It seems that much of what is claimed about these so-called deaconesses is guesswork or borrowed from the later development of this word and the institution of deaconesses and read back into the New Testament.

Much of what is stated today about the role and status of deaconesses reflects not biblical exegesis but familiar, denominational tradition superimposed on the text. It has to be honestly

admitted by those who believe the women of 1 Timothy 3:11 are deaconesses that their position is based on highly questionable evidence.

Finally, this view should be rejected because the evidence is better interpreted by the views that these *gynaikas* are women deacons or, as we shall soon see, wives of deacons.

IV. Women Helpers or Assistants to the Deacons

Not all interpreters are satisfied with the designations “women deacons” or “deaconesses.” Some Bible commentators claim that the women Paul refers to in verse 11 are deacon helpers assisting the deacons by ministering to women’s special needs.

The well-respected Bible commentator, William Hendriksen, proposes that these women are “women helpers,” or “deacons’ assistants”:

These women are not to be regarded as constituting a third office in the church, the office of “deaconesses,” on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons. ... [Paul] regards these women as the deacons’ assistants in helping the poor and needy, etc. These are women who render auxiliary service, performing ministries for which women are better adapted.”³⁶

Another variation of this position asserts that the women are unmarried women who assist male deacons in ministering to women:

The simplest explanation therefore for the women of 1 Timothy 3:11 is that they are unmarried women committed unconditionally to the service of the church, and who, in meeting certain character qualities, have been enlisted to aid the deacons in the outworking of their office.³⁷

Still others claim:

These were women who helped the church in some manner. ... They performed pastoral work with the sick and the poor and helped at baptism. ... The term “women helpers” refers to a special order of women who had a responsibility for ministry within the congregation.³⁸

Advocates of this view believe that Paul referred to these women as *gynaikas* because they had no official title. Although they had no official title, these women had designated functions to perform or there would have been no need to mention them or to require them to meet specific qualifications.

Evaluation of the Women-Helpers View

This view suffers from too much guesswork. Claims that these women comprise “a special order of women,” “women helpers,” “unmarried women committed unconditionally to the service of the church,” or “deacons’ assistants,” are all conjecture.

It is pure guesswork to assume that the omission of marital requirements indicates that these women were unmarried women serving the special needs of the women of the church. In fact, nothing whatsoever is stated about the roles of these women in helping the poor, helping with baptisms, or assisting in any other function. Paul’s concern in verse 11 focuses not on

functions, but on the women's public character in the way that he focuses on the public reputation of the male deacons (vv. 8–9, 12).

As we have already contended in the two previous views, one does have to question why Paul would use the general term, *gynaikes* (women/wives), rather than “women helpers” (*gynaikes boēthoi*). Also, the absence of any mention of the marital faithfulness of these so-called “women helpers” is problematic (see page 11). This view has not found many advocates.

V. The Wives of the Deacons

Although the wives-of-the-deacons view has fallen out of favor with most commentators today, I propose that it remains a viable interpretation. Advocates of this view believe that verse 11 presents an additional qualification for male deacons (= assistants), one that must be considered at the time of the candidate's examination for office:

And let them [male deacons] also be tested [examined] first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives [*gynaikas*] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. (1 Tim. 3:10–11)

Arguments for Deacons' Wives

1. Eliminating the Alternative Views

If I have correctly critiqued the four alternative views above and shown them to be less than convincing, then the wives-of-the-deacons view stands as the best option.

2. Wives, Not Assistants

Gynaikas as wives fits best with deacons being defined as assistants to the overseers/elders and Paul's overall teaching on women and men's roles in the family and church in terms of headship and submission (1 Cor. 11:3–16; 14:33–38; Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 2:8–15).

***Diakonoi* As Deacons:** A question that needs to be addressed is, should our English Bibles translate *diakonoi* in 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1 as “assistants,” instead of “deacons”? The distinguished Greek scholar, Edgar Goodspeed, in his translation, *The New Testament: An American Translation*, renders *diakonoi* as “assistants” in both passages. His translation instantly communicates who the *diakonoi* are and generally what they do:

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the devoted adherents of Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the superintendents and assistants. (Phil. 1:1)

Assistants, in turn, must be serious, straightforward men, not addicted to wine or dishonest gain. ... The assistants must be only once married,³⁹ and manage their children and their households well. For those who do good service as assistants gain a good standing for themselves and great confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:8, 12–13)

So we can translate *diakonoi* in 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1 as “assistants” and be perfectly

correct. But one of the problems is that the term *deacon* has become such a familiar part of our specialized church vocabulary that it would be difficult to eliminate, and most churches will not change from deacon to assistant. I suggest then that we can keep the term *deacon* (which is a transliteration of the Greek term *diakonos*) but explain that it means assistant to the overseers/elders. In this study I have more frequently used the term *deacon* in order not to confuse my readers, but I have also balanced this with rendering *diakonoi* many times as *assistants*.

I have found that most people are confused about who deacons are and what they do. So we can use the term but explain what it means and who the deacons are: assistants to the overseers/elders.

3. The Precise Choice of Terms

As we have repeatedly stated throughout this study, if the women appearing in verse 11 were church officials, it is truly odd that Paul called them *gynaikas* (women/wives), and did not give them a distinct title such as *gynaikas diakonous*. Paul gives both the overseers (*episkopoi*) and male deacons (*diakonoi*) specific, identifiable titles. Why are the women officeholders assigned no specific title, when Paul could have easily done this?

Paul was not struggling for words or titles, as some think, when referring to these women. It is more likely that he utilized the terms *diakonoi* and *gynaikes* deliberately and precisely: *diakonoi* used for male deacons in verses 8–10, and then again in verse 12, *diakonoi* used for male deacons (“the husband of one wife”). Between these two clear designations of *diakonoi*, Paul intentionally employed the term *gynaikas* to identify these women as “wives.”

“Wives” is an acceptable translation of *gynaikas*. Interestingly, most English Bibles translate the Greek word *gynaikas* as “wives.”⁴⁰

4. The Placement of the *Gynaikas* in the Midst of Male Deacons

Another reason for thinking that “wives” are meant is the placement of the term in the middle of Paul’s instructions on male deacons, rather than the placement of “[*gynaikas*] likewise” by itself, for instance, after verse 12:

Male overseers

3:1–2: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.

Male assistants (assuming women are not included)

3:8, 10: Deacons [males] likewise must be dignified. . . . And let them [male deacons] also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

Gynaikas

3:11: [*Gynaikas*] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Return to Male assistants

3:12: Let deacons [males] each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

It would seem strange if Paul addressed male deacons in verses 8–10, then interjected four qualifications for what are assumed to be women deacons in verse 11, and then reverted immediately (as an afterthought?) to the marital and family qualifications of the male deacons. But to be fair, such an afterthought is not without precedent in Paul’s writings (see 1 Cor. 1:14–16). If verse 11 refers to the deacons’ wives and not to women deacons, then verse 12 is not regarded as an afterthought or a return to male deacons after speaking of women deacons in verse 11.

According to verse 10, deacon candidates must be publicly examined by the church and its leaders and proven “blameless” before serving assistants to the overseers/elders. The rendering “wives likewise” does flow nicely out of verse 10, indicating that the wives must be “dignified,” like their deacon husbands. Based on this rendering, the deacon candidate’s wife, then, would be included in the examination of the candidate’s public reputation.

Furthermore, the translation “wives likewise must be” does not violate grammar or context. It is a legitimate interpretation and would form an integral part of the male deacons’ reputations, qualifications, and examinations.

Arguments Against Deacons’ Wives

Regardless of how one interprets verse 11, problems and perplexing questions plague each interpretation. We thus need to address two legitimate objections that are commonly raised against the wives-of-the-deacons view.

1. The Omission of the Pronoun or Article with *Gynaikas*

If Paul was referring to deacons’ wives, why did he omit the possessive pronoun *their* (*autōn*), or the definite article (*tas*), or both the definite article and pronoun? If he had written “their *gynaikas*” (*tas gynaikas autōn*), we would know with certainty that the women were the deacons’ wives. I have tried to answer this question on pages 5-6.

Again I repeat, it is easier to understand the omission of the pronoun “their” than it is to explain why Paul used the general term *gynaikas* (“women/wives”) instead of a specific term, *tas diakonous*, or *gynaikas diakonous* (women deacons).

2. The Omission of the Elders’ Wives’ Qualifications

Those who reject the view of deacons’ wives argue that the absence of a list of specific qualifications for an elder’s wife (in vv. 2–7) is another key indicator that verse 11 refers to women deacons, deaconesses, or helpers. If a deacon’s wife must meet certain character qualifications, should not such qualifications be required of an elder’s wife?

Some interpreters answer this objection by saying that while there is no need for the elders’ wives to be mentioned, the deacons’ wives needed mentioning because part of the deacons’ duties involves the care of widows and the poor, requiring the deacons’ wives to be more directly involved in helping their husbands in their work. As we have already mentioned, George Knight argues that the best reading of the structural and difficult syntactical evidence of the passage is that the women referred to in verse 11 are the deacons’ wives who officially assist their deacon husbands with the care of the church’s widows and other needy women.⁴¹

This is why no specific, official title is assigned to these women. In the case of the elders' wives, assisting their husbands in their primary duties of teaching the Word would be prohibited (1 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, Paul did not list the qualifications for an elder's wife.

Wives of Both Elders and Deacons: I propose that if a deacon's wife must be worthy of respect, it should be assumed, even though it's not stated directly, that an elder's wife must also be worthy of respect. If the wives of the deacons, the lesser office, must be of a certain moral character, the same principle should apply to the wives of the elders, the higher office.

It should go without saying that an elder's wife must be worthy of respect and of good character. She cannot be a malicious slanderer, or she will damage her husband's reputation ("above reproach," v. 2) and the credibility of the entire eldership. What might not be expected, but needed to be stated, is that a deacon's wife must be worthy of respect for the deacon to serve effectively as an assistant to the overseers/elders.

Although the elder's wife is not mentioned in verses 2–7, any serious assessment of a prospective elder's qualifications for office will include an evaluation of his wife and children to whom his public reputation is intimately tied (see vv. 4–5). In fact, this is what, in practice, is done by all responsible, biblically minded churches.

It should be assumed that whatever is required of a deacon's wife needs also to be required of an elder's wife.

It is quite possible that the deacons in Ephesus were treated as irrelevant as a result of the false teachers, who proudly claimed special knowledge⁴² and the prominent status of teachers. These pseudo-teachers would not have had much regard for the role of the deacons since they were not teachers, but viewed as underlings of the elders. But by (1) placing the deacons alongside the overseers (vv. 1–7), (2) listing similar elder-like qualifications for the deacons (vv. 8–10, 12), (3) requiring the deacons, like the overseers, to be publicly examined and approved (v. 10), and even (4) requiring their wives to be women worthy of respect, Paul corrects any such false notion of deacon irrelevance. Paul did not intend that the deacons' position and function be ignored or treated with contempt. These requirements demonstrate the significance of deacons to the church and its overseers/elders.

Another factor to consider is that the false teachers had made successful inroads into some of the female population of the church (1 Tim. 5:6, 11–15; 2 Tim. 3:5–7). This alarming situation may have compelled Paul to address the deacons' wives. Their godly character and reputation were essential to the public reputation and work of the deacons, so they had to be level-headed, respectable, and trustworthy in every way. These qualities would certainly be expected of the elders' wives, but possibly had become a neglected aspect of the deacons' fitness for office. Paul did not intend to let this be forgotten. Paul wanted to make perfectly clear that, as assistants to the elders, the deacons' wives must be of good character.

I would conclude that the public reputation of both the elders' and deacons' wives must be considered in the examination process (1 Tim. 3:10).

Whatever the reason for the absence of specific requirements for an elder's wife (and we may never know why), the omission does not present a decisive argument against the position that the deacons' wives are the women referred to in verse 11.

In trying to fit all the aspects of this textual puzzle together, I conclude that the translation "wives" allows most of the pieces to fit together best. Although the absence of the article (*tas*)

and pronoun “their” (*autōn*) is a problem to the wives-of-deacons view, a bigger problem in my mind is the absence of the title “women deacons” (*tas diakonous* or *gynaikas diakonous*).

But ultimately it is the view (1) that deacons are the official assistants to the overseers/elders and have authority over the congregation as agents of the elders, and (2) that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 forbids believing women from exercising “authority over a man” in the congregation that should guide our understanding of the perplexing syntactical questions of 1 Timothy 3:11 and the proper role of women in the church’s leadership.

Women Servants of the Lord

As I stated in Chapter 7 of *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons*, whether this passage addresses the deacons’ wives, women deacons, deaconesses, or helpers, Scripture directs all Christian women to be actively engaged in “the work of ministry [service], for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

First-century Christian women played an indispensable role in the Lord’s work. They were counted, involved, and active during the first days of the Christian movement (Acts 1:14). Yet their active role in advancing the gospel and caring for the Lord’s people was accomplished in ways that did not violate the divine pattern of masculine headship in the Church.

According to the New Testament, and dependent upon their individual giftedness, spiritual maturity, and appropriate settings, Christian women should be:

- wholeheartedly participating in the work of God, serving God and His people through the spiritual gifts He has given them (1 Cor. 7:34; 11:5; 16:15; Acts 16:15; Rom. 16:1-4, 6, 12).
- actively studying and learning the doctrines of Scripture. They should be able to defend their beliefs at any time and to instruct others in the faith (1 Peter 3:15; Acts 18:26; 1 Tim. 2:11).
- actively witnessing in evangelism (Phil. 4:2, 3; 2 Tim. 1:5).
- engaging in mercy ministries to needy people (Luke 8:1-3; Acts 9:36, 39; 1 Tim. 2:10; 3:11; 5:10, 16; Rom. 16:13).
- serving the local church (Rom. 16:1, 6).
- teaching domestic skills to other women (Titus 2:4, 5).
- showing hospitality (Acts 16:15; 18:3; 1 Tim. 5:10).
- praying and prophesying (1 Cor. 7:5; 11:5; Acts 21:9; 1 Tim. 5:5; Rev. 2:20).
- caring for their husbands and children (1 Tim. 2:15; 5:10, 14; Titus 2:4, 5).

The principle of male headship does not diminish the significance and necessity of a woman’s active involvement in the Lord’s work. Women are tremendous evangelists, prayer warriors, generation builders, mercy ministers, caregivers, dispensers of wisdom, and lovers of the Lord. Many women have suffered and been martyred for the gospel. We must never forget them, diminish their service to our Lord, or be ungrateful for their contribution.

¹So, J. G. Davies, "Deacons, Deaconesses, and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," *JEH* 14 (1963); Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Galatians–Philemon*, ACT, trans. and ed. Gerald L. Bray (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 128.

²"Women": NIV (2011), TNIV (2005), NASB, NRSV, RV, NCV, GNC.

³Charles W. Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses: 400 Years of Baptist Service* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2005), 219; Jennifer H. Stiefel, "Women Deacons in 1 Timothy: A Linguistic and Literary Look at 'Women likewise' (1 Tim. 3:11)," *NTS* 41 (1995); Barry L. Blackburn, "The Identity of the 'Women' in 1 Tim. 3:11," in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, vol. 1, ed. Carroll D. Osburn (Joplin, MD: College Press, 1993); Carolyn Osiek, "Deacon," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), 49.

⁴Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses*, 219; Blackburn, "The Identity of the 'Women' in 1 Tim. 3:11," 303, note 1.

⁵1 Timothy 3:2 in Greek: "*dei oun ton episkopon anepilēmpton einai*." The *dei* is an impersonal verb which means, "it is necessary." *Eintai* is the infinitive, "to be," and the infinitive phrase ("the overseer to be above reproach") is the subject of *dei*, i.e., "it is necessary for the overseer to be above reproach."

⁶Stiefel, "Women Deacons in 1 Timothy," 450. See also, Jamin Hübner, *A Case for Female Deacons* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 32.

⁷Stiefel, "Women Deacons in 1 Timothy," 446.

⁸Blackburn, "The Identity of the 'Women' in 1 Tim. 3:11," 308–09.

⁹Personal email correspondence with the author, July 7, 2016.

¹⁰For a must-read exposition of 1 Timothy 2:11–15, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

¹¹*Pastoral Epistles* (1874; repr. Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock, 1976), 150.

¹²"Servant": ESV, NIV (1974), NASB, CSB, RV, KJV, F. F. Bruce, MSNT, NET Bible. "A helper in the church at Cenchreae": Goodspeed and NCV. "Our sister . . . who serves the church at Cenchreae": GNT.

¹³The *Didascalia* is a church order manual, dated around AD 230, and composed in northern Syria. It represents Eastern Christianity. We no longer have the original Greek copies, only versions of the Greek. Most likely the original Greek *Didascalia* identified female deacons by attaching the feminine article to *diakonos* (*hē diakonos*), and also by writing "woman deacons" (*gynaikes diakonoi*). The *Didascalia* does not use the Greek term *diakonissa* (deaconess).

The *Apostolic Constitutions* (AD 380), which incorporated the *Didascalia*, does use both the term *diakonissa* (deaconess), and *diakonoi* with the feminine article or *gynaikes*.

¹⁴George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 172.

¹⁵See Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Brancote Notts: Grove Books, 1976), 8–15.

¹⁶*Deaconesses: A Historical Study*, trans. K. D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 32.

¹⁷Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History* 6.43.11 (ed. and trans. J. E. L. Oulton, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1932), 2:119.

¹⁸See also Martimort, *Deaconesses: A Historical Study*, 28–32, 104.

¹⁹Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, HNTC (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2000), 458. The personal translations of Charles Williams and Richard Weymouth have deaconess, and also the *Revised Standard Version*.

²⁰Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women's Early Christian History," *Word and World* 6 (1986), 426.

²¹Dieter Georgi draws on his own original research of the ancient *diakon-* word group and the sacred commissioned messenger aspect of *diakonos*. He claims that deacons are heralds and proclaimers of the gospel, never ministers of charity; they are the missionaries or evangelists of the church (*The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 27–32).

²²John B. Cobb Jr., and David J. Lull, *Romans* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2005), 184. Also, John E. Toews, *Romans*, BCBC (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2004); Robert Jewett, "Paul, Phoebe, and the Spanish Mission," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner et al., Festschrift for H. C. Kee (Philadelphia: 1988).

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- ²³Paul's coworkers, Timothy and Tychicus, are both called "brother" and *diakonos* (1 Thess. 3:2; Col. 4:7). Phoebe, it is claimed, bears the same designations as Paul's associates in the gospel. Also, the verb from *prostatis* (patron, leader) is used by Paul for church leaders (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17).
- ²⁴"Servant": ESV, CSB, NIV (1974), NASB, RV, KJV, Bruce, MSNT, NET Bible. "A helper in the church at Cenchreae": Goodspeed and NCV. "Our sister . . . who serves the church at Cenchreae": GNT.
- ²⁵"Patron" (*prostatis*): "she has proved to be of great assistance to many, including myself" (BDAG, 885); "benefactor," NIV, NRSV, CSB; "helper," NASB.
- ²⁶BDAG, 230. John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 224–25. Clarence Agan III, "Deacons, Deaconesses, and Denominational Discussions: Romans 16:1 as a Test Case," *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review*, 34/2 (Fall 2008), 105–08.
- ²⁷Martimort, *Deaconesses: A Historical Study*, 43.
- ²⁸Ibid, 247.
- ²⁹Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1958), 140.
- ³⁰Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses*, 219.
- ³¹Ibid, 219.
- ³²Stiefel, "Women Deacons in 1 Timothy," 453.
- ³³Pliny's Letters, trans. William Melmoth, rev. W. M. L. Hutchinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1915), 10.46.
- ³⁴"And we mean by deaconesses such as have assumed the habit, but who, since they have no imposition of hands, are to be numbered only among the laity" (Council in Nicaea, "Canon 19" [*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14:107]).
- ³⁵Paul seems to have coined the term "breathed out by God" (*theopneustos*) in 2 Timothy 3:16, and also "super-apostles" (*hyperlian apostolon*) and pseudo-apostles [or "false apostles" as in ESV] (*pseudapostoloi*) in 2 Corinthians 11:5, 13.
- ³⁶*Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 133.
- ³⁷Robert M. Lewis, "The 'Women' of 1 Timothy 3:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979), 175.
- ³⁸Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 120.
- ³⁹Most commentators today reject the translation, "must be only once married" (*mias gynaikos andres*, "the husband of one wife"), in favor of the meaning "marital faithfulness."
- ⁴⁰"Wives": KJV, NKJV, NIV (1984), ESV, CSB, Goodspeed, Phillips, MNT, Godbey, NET Bible, GNT, NLT, NEB.
- ⁴¹Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 172.
- ⁴²1 Tim. 1:3–7; 19–20; 4:1–3, 7; 6:3–5; 20–21.