

UNPACKING THE CHURCH: CLEARING UP CONFUSION

UNDERSTANDING CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Offices of the Church: Deacons

1. The term "Deacon"
 - a. Verb 37x
 - b. Noun (Deaconos) 33x
 - c. English word "deacon" is used only 5x, 4 of which are in 1 Timothy 3
 - d. There is NO Greek word "deaconess."
2. Meaning of the term
 - a. Table server
 - b. An attendant to a high official, one who executes the commands of another
 - c. A person who renders helpful service, servant

3. Uses

a. Acts 6:1-6

The word "deacon" is used as a noun in both v 1 and v 4. In v 4 it is in connection to the work of the apostles as "ministers" of the Word. It is used as a verb in v 2.

- b. **Romans 16:1** "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea."
- c. **Ephesians 6:21** "But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you."
- d. **Philippians 1:1** "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons"
- e. **Philippians 2:25** "*But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need*" [Word "deacon" is not used here but there is a distinct similarity between this and other passages in which the word is used.]
- f. **Colossians 1:7** "just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf"
- g. **Colossians 4:7** "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information."
- h. **1 Timothy 3:8-13**
- i. Paul describes himself as a "deacon" (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 6:4; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23; 1:25)

What about gender?

1. Paul refers to Phoebe as a "deacon" of the church

Romans 16:1-2 "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (deacon) of the church which is at Cenchrea." He goes on to instruct the church to "help her in whatever matter she may have need of you. His reason for this help is that she "has been a helper of many" and of Paul himself (v 2).

2. In same context, Paul refers to Prisca as a "fellow-worker" (v 3)
3. Philippians 4:2-3 indicates that Euodia and Syntyche were sharing in the "work" of ministry
4. 1 Timothy 3:11

- a. There is no gender designation until v 11

- i. V 11 literally says, "women/wives likewise sensible/dignified"
- ii. Gunaikas could be translated either women or wives, context dictates
- iii. There is no possessive ("their") in the text, it is assumed
- iv. The phrase is the exact word construction from v 8, "Deacons likewise dignified" the only difference being "women/wives")
- v. This is the second occurrence in this paragraph of the word "likewise" or "in the same way"

- b. Everyone agrees that these particular qualifications apply to women. The question is whether or not the women are more specifically the deacons' wives.

- c. There is no such qualification for elder's wives

- i. Some argue that the "likewise" links this back to the elders' wives even though they are not mentioned. This assumes that these qualifications would apply to elder's wives as well
- ii. Others argue that the nature of deacon ministry, meeting people-needs, would mean knowing life details, so wives would have to be tight-lipped.
- iii. Others argue that the wives were to be assistants to the husbands in this serving ministry (which is very close to saying the wives were deacons without saying it).

- d. Some have assumed another office of "deaconess"

- i. The reoccurrence of "likewise" is the indication of this
- ii. However, nothing else argues for an additional office but rather for gender specific qualifications for those serving in the one office
- iii. In the 3rd century, churches began using this terminology for women servants

- e. Some argue that the structure of v 12 argues against the translation "women"

- i. The verse begins with a repeat of the word "deacons"
- ii. The qualification is specific to men only "one woman/wife man"

- f. However, this could just as easily be a further identification of gender specific qualifications

- i. Women deacons must be...
- ii. Men deacons must be... This would not require beginning the verse with "men" as in v 11 because the context clearly speaks to men later, "husbands/men"
- iii. Most end up treating the word "gunaikas" as if translated "woman" in both v 2 and v 12—"One woman man."

- g. This word is translated clearly as "woman" generically in 2:9, 10, 11 and 12, as well as 2 Timothy 3:6