

Who Are Deacons Supposed to Be?

5/1/2016

3 weeks ago, we talked about what elders were to do.
 2 weeks ago, we talked about what elders were to be.
 Last week, we talked about what deacons were to do,
 based on what the word means in the Greek-
 “one who serves.”

From that,
 and seeing how the word was used in the New Testament
 up until Paul’s imprisonment in Rome,
 the word was applied to any who served,
 in a number of different ways.

1. Jesus served.
2. The apostles were to serve, and then did.
3. Paul served.
4. Timothy. Epaphras, Tychicus...
 a bunch of people served, or were called servants,
 (deaconos).

But in Phil. 1:1, we saw that Paul addresses
 All the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi,
 together with the overseers and deacons:
 “those who serve.”

This is the first time that it seems that this specific term
 may be referring to a specific group of people.

By the time Timothy gets to Ephesus in I Timothy 3,
 that pattern seems to be extended to include Ephesus.

Here is what an Elder or overseer is to be like.

And here is what a deaconos-“one who serves” is to be like.

I Timothy 3:8-13

⁸ Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect,
sincere, not indulging in much wine,
 and not pursuing dishonest gain.

⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith
 with a clear conscience.

¹⁰ They must first be tested;
 and then if there is nothing against them,
 let them serve (as deacons).

¹¹ In the same way, (Women, likewise- same word as in v. 8)
 women (their) wives are to be women worthy of respect,
 not malicious talkers but temperate
 and trustworthy in everything.

¹² A deacon must be “the husband of but one wife”
 and must manage his children and his household well.

¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and
 great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

We see in both v. 8 and 11,
 the words “likewise,” and semnous- worthy of respect.

As the elders were to be “above reproach” or blameless,
 so both the deacons and the women mentioned in v. 11
 are to be worthy of respect, “in the same way.”

There is no clear parallel or one-word translation
 for the word translated here “worthy of respect.”

Serious, sober-minded, clear-thinking-
 these approach the meaning.

Deacons are to NOT be di-logos- double tongued.

“Tonto say- Him speak with forked tongue.”

“Talking out of both sides of his mouth,”

saying one thing to one person,

and something else to another person.

THAT is the sense of “sincere” here.

“ Not indulging in much wine...”

Could someone do this and be clear-thinking,

serious-minded, worthy of respect?

“Not pursuing filthy (or dishonest) gain.”

Much of their work

apparently has to do with distribution of resources.

This is to be NOT like Judas, who (John 12:4-6)

But Judas Iscariot,

one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said,

⁵ “Why was this ointment not sold

for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”

⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but

because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag

he used to help himself to what was put into it.

As Paul goes city to city,

gathering contributions for the saints in Jerusalem,

he took stewards from every city,

people that were respected as trustworthy

from their home congregations,

to make sure that Paul was “above reproach.”

That’s the sense of it here.

⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith
with a clear conscience.
Deep truths is translating deep “mysterion” or mysteries,
because the meaning has changed.

When WE think of mysteries, we think of secrets.
Paul is using the term for the things hidden
that have NOW been made known-
the truth of the gospel proclamation.

⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith
with a clear conscience.

In 1:5 we read,
The goal of this command is love,
which comes from a pure heart
and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

In 1:18-19 we read,
Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction
in keeping with the prophecies once made about you,
so that by following them you may fight the good fight,
holding on to faith and a good conscience...

The other two passages talk of a good conscience.
Here the word is clean or clear, like clean, versus “unclean.”

¹⁰ They must first be tested;
and then if there is nothing against them,
let them serve (as deacons).

Test them.

In the same way that elders couldn't,
shouldn't be neophytes, noobs,

These men shouldn't be untested...for their sakes,
as well as everybody else's.

Test them, and then if there is nothing against them,
no reproach, no bad reputation, worthy of respect,
then let them serve.

"Make disciples...teaching them to do or obey
everything I have commanded you"... comes to mind.

Those who are faithful with few things
can be entrusted with many things. (Matt. 25:21, 23)

Again,

1. Doing what? Serving.
2. In what ways? Does it matter?

Just for fun, but also to show
how seriously other traditions take this injunction-

The Church of England scrupulously acts up to these directions by requiring written testimonials, by personal inquiries made by the bishop, by the *Si quis*, by the appeal to the congregation in the Ordination Service, "Brethren, if there be any of you who knoweth any impediment, or notable crime, in any of these persons presented to be ordained deacons, for the which be ought not to be admitted to that office, let him come forth in the name of God, and show what the crime or impediment is;" all well as by the careful examination of the candidates. (Spence Jones, I Timothy)

That takes us up to v. 11.

Ah, verse 11, the 900 pound gorilla in the room.
One of those passages that makes folks
from all different theological persuasions quake and shiver.

¹¹ In the same way, (Women, likewise- same word as in v. 8)
women (their) wives are to be women worthy of respect,
not malicious talkers but temperate
and trustworthy in everything.

I would like to read from

3 respected Commentaries

and then add a comment or two of my own.

Who are these *gynaikas* Paul addressed? They were almost certainly not the women of the congregation generally. They were most likely either the wives of the deacons or a group of female deacons (cf. Phoebe, Rom. 16:1). A case can be made for either of these two options, with a slim advantage falling to the first. But being dogmatic about either view is unwarranted by the exegetical data.¹

3:11. Scholars debate whether “women” here refers to deaconesses or to male deacons’ wives, although even the Roman government was aware of Christian deaconesses (female deacons) by A.D. 112. Thus Paul either requires upright behavior on the part of church officials’ wives (in ancient society, men were often ridiculed for their wives’

¹ Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 738). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

behavior) or explains some different requirements for women deacons .²

Hendriksen takes somewhat of a mediating position. He writes,

They are a group by themselves, not just the wives of the deacons nor *all* the women who belong to the church.... On the other hand, the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, with equal clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third order in the church, the office of 'deaconesses,' on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons (pp. 132, 133). (Expos. Bible Comm.)

So there we have 3 different renderings of this same passage, all scholarly, all sincerely searching for the truth from Scripture, not beating on a bunch of theological drums.

Their wives, deaconesses, female deacons,
or something else.
 We could wish it were more clear, and it IS clear, to you,
once you take a position.
 I have lost sleep over this passage,
shed tears over this passage,
 all because I don't trust us to act like
loving brothers and sisters around this passage.

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament (1 Ti 3:11)*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Can you guys prove me wrong this morning?

I would like to offer this proposal-

1. We could stage a debate-

which Paul warns us repeatedly NOT to do

in I and II Timothy,

2. We COULD study this passage in a Bible class,

and we have repeatedly, for years,

3. We could just go off in a huff

and split the church wide open, just to have our way,

or,

4. We COULD choose to act on what we CAN agree on,

that at least clearly, men are tagged as

deacons, special servants, whatever- here,

And agree that there are honest differences in opinion

about what to do with verse 11,

and let people hold their personal views,

and not bind other views on them,

but DO, act on- what we CAN Biblically agree on.

You are so worth me not insisting on my own way.

Am I worth it... to you?

If not me, how about your other brothers and sisters,

that you have known for decades?

Vs. 12-

A deacon must be the husband of but one wife

(Again, the phrase in Greek is a one woman man)

and must manage his children and his household well.

If a deaconos is fulfilling
 some kind of administration function,
 he has to have proven managerial experience,
 not from the workplace, because the church is not
 a for-profit dictatorship, but a family.

So what do you get for being
 a good version of “one who serves?”

¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing
 and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

3:13. Though the position of deacon seems by worldly standards to be menial and unattractive, to close followers of Jesus Christ it looks quite different (cf. John 13:11–17; Mark 10:42–45).

Those who fulfill their servant roles faithfully gain two things: first, an excellent standing before fellow Christians who understand and appreciate the beauty of humble, selfless, Christlike service; and second, great assurance (*parrēsian*, “confidence, boldness”) in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Humble service, which lacks all the rewards the world deems important, becomes a true test of one’s motives. Here one discovers for himself whether or not his efforts are truly prompted by a Christlike spirit of selfless service.

When a deacon has indeed “served well” his ministry builds confidence in the sincerity of his own faith in Christ, and of his unhypocritical approach to God.

(cf. Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19) (Bible Knowledge Comm.)

**That seems like a good place
to wind up our conversation about
the attributes of deacons, “those who serve.”**

We all are to serve.

**Some will have a specifically identified role of service,
that supports the ministry of the elders and evangelists.**

We all are, in that sense, deacons.

**And yet, Paul identifies criteria, qualities of life
for those who are appointed to special roles of service.**

**Be praying for God to raise those people up,
like Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:2,
“for the work to which I have called them.”**

**Be asking God to prepare you
to be one of those people... amen?**

I Timothy 3:8-13

Paul mentions deacons in conjunction with overseers in Phil 1:1, and it is clear that the two offices were closely connected. Indeed the list of desirable qualities stated here is akin to that for overseers. Again, worthiness of the respect of others is of utmost importance, as are sincerity and general moral standards. Since candidates for both offices must be those *not indulging in much wine*, this suggests that excessive wine drinking was a problem among the people of Ephesus. Of greater importance is that the deacons must be of sound faith (9), a point often overlooked in appointments to the lesser Christian offices. For Paul the theological position was crucial. The testing referred to in v 10 is presumably by the Christian assembly to ensure that the necessary qualities are evident.

V 11 looks like an interlude, and some have suggested that it points to an order of deaconesses. Although such an order is not impossible, the primary reference is probably to deacons' wives (as the NIV). These must be serious in mind and careful in speech lest they detract from their husband's work. The remaining requirements for deacons are closely paralleled in the section on overseers. Does the *excellent standing* (13) mean standing in the sight of the Christian community, or in the sight of outsiders, or in the sight of God? Of these the second seems most likely, not in the sense of providing for future promotion, but in exerting influence. This accords best with the reference to their assurance of faith.³

3:8. Like overseers, deacons (cf. Phil. 1:1) must also be men of quality, even though their function in the congregation is significantly different. The word translated "deacon" (*diakonos*) means literally a "humble servant." The role of the deacons is to carry out, under the elders' oversight, some of the more menial tasks of the church so that the elders can give their attention to more important things. (See Acts 6:1–6 for the prototype of what later became the "office" of deacon in the church.) The qualifications for the office of deacon are almost as stringent as for elder because of their public profile in the church and because the servant nature of their work requires strong qualities of maturity and piety. Deacons must therefore be men worthy of respect—that is, serious men of dignity, not clowns. (The same Gr. word is used of women in 1 Tim. 3:11.) They must be sincere (*mē dilogous*, lit., "not double-tongued") in the sense of being honest and unhypocritical. Like the overseers (v. 3), deacons must not be heavy wine drinkers or greedy chasers after dishonest gain.⁴

³ Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1299). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁴ Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 737–738). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3:8. New Testament texts use the term translated “deacon” in several ways. It usually means a servant-minister, generally a minister of the word, like Paul. But sometimes it is an office distinguished from “overseers” (Phil 1:1) and is probably parallel to the office of the *chazan* in the synagogue. This synagogue attendant was responsible for the synagogue building and would normally have been the owner of the home in which a house synagogue met. Unlike elders (3:2), this sort of “deacon” may have fulfilled an administrative function without much public teaching.⁵

Paul says that the deacons, like the overseers, are to be men “worthy of respect.” This is one word in Greek, the adjective *semnos* (cf. the noun *semnotēs* in 2:2 and 3:4). Vine says of this term: “No English word exactly conveys the meaning of *semnos*, which combines the thoughts both of gravity and dignity,” or, as Moule points out, “both of seriousness of purpose and self-respect in conduct” (p. 55).

In the second place, the deacons are to be “sincere”—literally, “not double-tongued.” The adjective *dilogos* (only here in the NT) has the idea of saying something twice, with the bad connotation of saying one thing to one person and something else to another⁶

3:9. Most important of all, deacons must be men of spiritual depth (cf. Acts 6:3). Specifically they should be men who understand and hold fast the deep truths of the faith. By the phrase with a clear conscience Paul (cf. “good conscience” in 1 Tim. 1:5) meant that there must be nothing in the conduct of these men that was glaringly inconsistent with their professed beliefs. In other words they must not profess one thing but practice another.⁷

Double-tongued (διδλόγους) only here in the New Testament, or indeed anywhere. The verb διλογεῖν, and the noun διλογία, are found in Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus, but in a different sense—“to repeat,” “repetition.” Here δῆλος, is used in the sense of δῆλωστος, (Prov. 11:13; Eccles. 28:13), “a slanderer,” “a false tongued man,” who, as Theophylact (ap. Schleusner) well explains it, thinks one thing and says another, and says different things to different people. The caution here given is of incalculable importance to young curates. They must not allow themselves to be either receptacles or vehicles of scandal and detraction. Their speech to rich and poor alike must be perfectly sincere and ingenuous.

Greedy of filthy lucre (αἰσχροκερδεῖς); only here and in ver. 3 (T.R.) and Titus 1:7. The adverb αἰσχροκερδῶς, occurs in 1 Pet. 5:2, and is one of many points of resemblance

⁵ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (1 Ti 3:8). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁶ Earle, R. (1981). 1 Timothy. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Vol. 11, p. 367). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁷ Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 738). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

between the pastoral Epistles and 1 Peter. Balaam, Gehazi, and Judas Iscariot are the three prominent examples of professed servants of God being lovers of filthy lucre. Achan (Josh. 7:21) is another (see ch. 6:10). When lucre is the price for doing wrong, it is “filthy.” When lucre is sought on occasions where none is due, it is “filthy;” and when the desire of even just gains is excessive, it ceases to be clean.⁸

The third qualification is “not indulging in much wine.” This is a longer and stronger expression than that found in v. 3 in relation to the overseers.

Item number four is “not pursuing dishonest gain” (*mē aischrokerdeis*, only here and in Titus 1:7). The adjective is compounded of *aichros* (“base, shameful”) and *kerdos* (“gain”) and so means “fond of dishonest gain.”

9 KJV gives a literal rendering of this verse: “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” The word *mystērion* was used in that day for a secret that was unknown to the masses but disclosed to the initiated. In the NT it signifies the secret of salvation through Jesus Christ, which is revealed by the Holy Spirit to all who will believe. Today the word *mystery* implies knowledge withheld; in the Bible it indicates truth revealed. That is the reason for the change in translation.

Probably “the faith” is to be taken in an objective sense, referring to the truths of the Christian religion, rather than as subjective, having to do with one’s personal faith in Christ.

This Epistle has a strong emphasis on a pure conscience as well as a pure faith. We have already had the expression “a good conscience” twice (1:5, 19). Vine writes, “A pure conscience is that which has been cleansed by the blood of Christ, Heb 10:22, and is exercised to avoid offence towards God and men, Acts 24:16” (p. 56).

10 Deacons “must first be tested” (KJV, “proved”). The verb *dokimazō* has three stages: (1) test, (2) prove by testing; (3) approve as the result of testing. Perhaps all three are in mind here. Before men were accepted as deacons they had to prove themselves before the community. Then they could serve as deacons, “if there is nothing against them”—literally, “being not called in” (*anenklētos*, “not called to account,” and so, “irreproachable”).⁹

3:9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.

From negative characteristics Paul turns to the positive: deacons must “keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.” The false teachers have turned away from a good conscience and “have suffered shipwreck in the faith” (1:5–6, 19–20). These men who serve must also show “a proper doctrinal and moral response to Christ’s message.” “Deep truths” represents the favorite Pauline word “mystery.” Paul here uses “the faith” in an objective manner, the substance of what is believed, a synonym for “the gospel.” The “deep truths of the faith” are neither deep truths hard to understand nor secrets preserved

⁸ Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *1 Timothy* (p. 53). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

⁹ Earle, R. (1981). *1 Timothy*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Vol. 11, pp. 367–368). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

only for the enlightened. They are rather truths of the gospel hidden until revealed by God in Jesus. “Conscience” is used frequently in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:5, 19; 4:2; 2 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:15). It represents the inner guide to life. The deacon must be a man who demonstrates a continual struggle to live a life characterized by obedience to the gospel message.¹⁰

Ver. 9.—Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Μυστήριον, a mystery, is that which, having been long hidden, is at length disclosed, either to men generally or to elect disciples. It is derived from μύω, to initiate, of which the passive μύεσθαι, to be instructed or initiated, is found in Phil. 4:12, and is common in classical Greek, being itself derived from μύω, “to close the lips as in pronouncing the syllable μῦ,” whence also *mutus*. The idea is of something *secret*, which might not be spoken of. In the New Testament we have “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10; Mark 4:11); and St. Paul brings out the full force of the word when he speaks (Rom. 16:25) of “the mystery which was *kept secret* (συστημένον) since the world began but is now made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (see too Eph. 3:3–6; Col. 1:26, etc.). “The faith” is equivalent to “the gospel,” or “the kingdom of heaven,” or the “godliness” of ver. 16 (where see note); and “the mystery of the faith” might be paraphrased by “the revealed truth of Christianity.” What is added, “in a pure conscience” teaches us that orthodoxy without personal holiness is of little worth. Holding “the truth in unrighteousness” is severely condemned by St. Paul (Rom. 1:18). He says of himself (Acts 23:1), “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (comp. Acts 24:16; 2 Cor. 1:12; ch. 1:5, 19, etc.). It is much to be observed how St. Paul, the great teacher of the doctrine of grace, lays constant stress upon the functions of the conscience, and the entire necessity of having a pure conscience.¹¹

3:10. Moreover, like the overseers, who are to demonstrate their maturity before being placed in a position of responsibility (v. 6), deacons must also first be tested. Paul’s intent here was not to require some formal testing procedure, but rather that these men “prove” their quality over time in the ordinary activities of life and ministry. After they showed themselves “irreproachable,” then let them serve as deacons. The words if there is nothing against them translate two Greek words, *anenklētoi ontes*, “being free from accusation.” The word *anenklētos* occurs in the New Testament only in Paul’s writings (1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6–7). It means one who is unaccused, free from any charge at all. Christlike conduct is required of deacons. (Cf. comments on a synonym, *anepilēmpton*, in 1 Tim. 3:2.)¹²

¹⁰ Moss, C. M. (1994). *1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (1 Ti 3:9). Joplin, MO: College Press.

¹¹ Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *1 Timothy* (p. 53). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

¹² Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 738). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3:10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

Deacons must be men of proven worth. They must “be tested.” “Unknown” men are not to be appointed to fulfill this task. The testing, a word used for the testing of a metal to determine its purity, should make it clear that “there is nothing against” these men. The phrase there is nothing against them (ἀνέγκλητοι, *aneklētoi*) is used of elders in Titus 1:6 where it is rendered by the NIV “blameless” and is a synonym for the word used of overseers in 3:2 rendered “above reproach.” Only after this has been established are these men to be appointed and to serve as deacons.¹³

Ver. 10—*Serve as deacons for use the office, of a deacon, A.V. if they be for being found, A.V. And let these also, etc.* There is an ambiguity in the English here. It is not “these also”—these in addition to others, *i.e.* the bishops before named—but “these be also first proved.” Their general character, as described in vers. 8, 9, must not be taken upon loose hearsay, but must be put to the test by examination, by special testimony, by inquiry, and then, if they are ἀνέγκλητοι, not accused, not open to just blame, *blameless*, let them be admitted to serve as deacons (see ver. 13, note). The Church of England scrupulously acts up to these directions by requiring written testimonials, by personal inquiries made by the bishop, by the *Si quis*, by the appeal to the congregation in the Ordination Service, “Brethren, if there be any of you who knoweth any impediment, or notable crime, in any of these persons presented to be ordained deacons, for the which be ought not to be admitted to that office, let him come forth in the name of God, and show what the crime or impediment is;” all well as by the careful examination of the candidates. Blameless (comp. Titus 1:6, 7); ἀνέγκλητος, rendered in the Vulgate *nullum crimen habentes* (which seems to explain the “notable crime” of the Ordination Service), and in Col. 1:22 “unreprovable” both in the A.V. and the R.V. The whole passage, from ver. 2 to ver. 13, shows the supreme importance of a holy and blameless conversation in the clergy.¹⁴

3:11. Similarly the *gynaikas* (“women” or wives) are to be worthy of respect, that is, dignified (the same word, *semnas*, is used of deacons in v. 8), not slanderers (*diabolous*, from *diaballō* “to slander”; from this verb comes the noun “devil,” the chief slanderer) of others, but temperate (*nēphalious*, “well-balanced;” cf. v. 2; Titus 2:2), and trustworthy (lit., “faithful”) in everything. Who are these *gynaikas* Paul addressed? They were almost certainly not the women of the congregation generally. They were most likely either the wives of the deacons or a group of female deacons (cf. Phoebe, Rom. 16:1). A case can be

¹³ Moss, C. M. (1994). *1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (1 Ti 3:10). Joplin, MO: College Press.

¹⁴ Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *1 Timothy* (p. 53). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

made for either of these two options, with a slim advantage falling to the first. But being dogmatic about either view is unwarranted by the exegetical data.¹⁵

3:11. Scholars debate whether “women” here refers to deaconesses or to male deacons’ wives, although even the Roman government was aware of Christian deaconesses (female deacons) by A.D. 112. Thus Paul either requires upright behavior on the part of church officials’ wives (in ancient society, men were often ridiculed for their wives’ behavior) or explains some different requirements for women deacons. Gossip was especially associated with and probably more often practiced by women than by men in the ancient world (cf. 5:13).¹⁶

Ver. 11.—*Women in like manner must for even so must their wives*, A.V. *temperate for sober*, A.V. *Women*. What is meant by these “women”? Certainly not women in general, which would be quite out of harmony with the context. The choice lies between (1) the wives of the deacons, as in the A.V. (2) the wives of the episcopi and deacons; (3) deaconesses. This last, on the whole; is the most probable. The male deacons had just been spoken of, and so the apostle goes on to speak of the female deacons (ἀδιάκονοι, Rom. 16:1). He conceives of the deacon’s office as consisting of two branches—(1) the deacons, (2) the deaconesses; and gives appropriate directions for each. It must be remembered that the office of the early deacon was in a great measure secular, so that there is nothing strange in that of the deaconess being coupled with it. The return in ver. 12 to the male deacon is in favour of understanding “the women” of the deaconesses, as showing that the subject of the diaconate was not done with. Chrysostom (who says, “He is speaking of those who hold the rank of deaconesses”) and all the ancient commentators, and De Wette, Wiesinger, Wordsworth, Alford, and Ellicott among the moderns, so understand it (see following notes). Grave (σεμνὰς, see ver. 8, note). Not slanderers (μὴ διαβόλους, corresponding to the μὴ διλόγους of ver. 8). This use of διάβολος, which is the classical one, is peculiar in the New Testament to the pastoral Epistles (see 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3). Temperate (νηφαλίους; see ver. 2, note). It corresponds here to the μὴ οἶνω πολλῶ προσέχοντας, of ver. 8. Faithful in all things (πιστὰς ἐν πᾶσιν). This seems to refer specially to their being the almoners of the Church charities, and so favours the explanation of “women” as meaning deaconesses. Πιστός, means especially “trusty” (Matt. 24:45; 25:21; Luke 12:42; 16:10, etc.).¹⁷

¹⁵ Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 738). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁶ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (1 Ti 3:11). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁷ Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *1 Timothy* (pp. 53–54). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

3:11 In the same way, their wives

At this point, Paul makes a transition in the topic under discussion. This sentence (v. 11) has proven to be a real puzzle for those studying 1 Timothy. Who are the “women” (γυναῖκας, *gynaikas*) of this verse? Are they “wives” as the NIV has suggested in the text? Or should one favor the margin reading of the NIV “deaconesses”? The Greek word “woman” (γυνή, *gynē*) can be rendered either “woman” or “wife” depending upon the context.

The problem is complicated by the fact that “deacons” are addressed on both sides of the discussion of these “women.” Also the structure of v. 11 is parallel to v. 8 and therefore dependent upon the “must” of v. 2. It looks as if Paul is giving qualifications for a ministry like that of overseer and deacon. If Paul had in mind the wives of deacons, he could have clarified the matter by simply adding the Greek word for “their” (αὐτῶν, *autōn*). It should be noted that the word “their” in the text of the NIV has been supplied by the translators and is not present in the Greek text. The issue is complicated even further because in Paul’s time there is no word in Greek for “deaconess.”

Several alternatives have been offered for understanding who these “women” were. First, some have suggested that these women represent the wives of the deacons because they reflect on the character and ministry of their husbands. In favor of this suggestion is the omission of any qualification regarding marital status found in qualifications for overseers, deacons and older women who were to be enrolled. This can easily be explained if they are deacons’ wives.

Others, troubled by the idea that Paul would give qualities required for deacons’ wives and not those of elders, have suggested that these are qualities required for the wives of both sets of church leaders. A primary problem with this interpretation is, of course, the placement of the qualifications.

A third suggestion is that these women represent deaconesses or women deacons. The difficulty with this interpretation is threefold: First, Paul begins v. 11 with “in the same way” (ὡσαύτως, *hōsautōs*) indicating a distinct group (cf. v. 8 and deacons as distinct from overseers). He is, therefore, apparently dealing with a new group of people or workers. Second, if these women are serving as *deacons*, why not make one set of qualifications that would apply to men and women? Third, why place this list in the middle of the qualifications of deacons? A fourth alternative is to see these women serving in some form of ministry assisting the deacons. One problem with this interpretation is the omission of any requirement regarding marital status and fidelity when this requirement is so prominent in the other groups.

When all of the data is considered, options one and four seem to be most viable. Although he does not formerly propose it, Knight seems to suggest a fifth option which amounts to a combination of the first and fourth. He suggests that Paul is proposing “the deacons’ wives as their assistants rather than women in general.” However one takes this passage, it is clear that the church throughout the ages has had women who serve in special capacities or ministries. Paul is simply calling these women to bear the characteristics one would expect of women to whom others look.

...are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

The qualifications for these “women” are virtually synonymous with those of the deacons. Both groups are to be “worthy of respect.” Not malicious talkers (μη διαβόλους, *mē diabolous*) is parallel to “sincere” (δίλογος, *dilogos*). Temperate (νηφαλίους, *nēphaliouς*)—a word which Knight suggests is compressed and encompasses “temperate use of alcoholic beverages, sober, clear-headed, self-controlled”—may well include everything from “not given to drunkenness” to “not violent but gentle” to “not quarrelsome” to “not a lover of money.”¹⁸

1 Timothy 3:11

Women (γυναϊκας [*gunaikas*]). Accusative with δει ειναι [*dei einai*] understood (ὁσαυτως [*hosautōς*], likewise) as in verse 8. Apparently “women as deacons” (Rom. 16:1 about Phoebe) and not women in general or just “wives of deacons.” See Pliny (*Ep. X. 97*) *ministrae*. Not slanderers (μη διαβολους [*mē diabolous*]). Original meaning of διαβολος [*diabolos*] (from διαβαλλω [*diaballō*], Luke 16:1), the devil being the chief slanderer (Eph. 6:11). “She-devils” in reality (Titus 2:3). “While men are more prone to be διλογους [*dilogous*], double-tongued, women are more prone than men to be slanderers” (White). Faithful in all things (πιστας ἐν πασιν [*pistas en pāsīn*]). Perhaps as almoners (Ellicott) the deaconesses had special temptations.¹⁹

11. Their wives (γυναϊκας). Probably correct, although some find a reference to an official class of women—deaconesses (so Ellicott, Holtzmann, Alford). But the injunction is thrown incidentally into the admonition concerning Deacons, which is resumed at ver. 12; and if an official class were intended we should expect something more specific than γυναικας *women* or *wives* without the article. A Deacon whose wife is wanting in the qualities required in him, is not to be chosen. She would sustain an active relation to his office, and by her ministries would increase his efficiency, and by frivolity, slander, or intemperance, would bring him and his office into disrepute.²⁰

(3:11) The word “wives” is gunē (γυνή), “a woman.” The word when used in reference to the marriage relation, means “a wife.” Here, it should be translated “women.” It does not necessarily refer to the wives of the deacons, and for the following reasons: first, the words, “even so,” are the translation of hōsautōς (ὁσαυτως), which is used in introducing a second or third in a series. The series here is of Church officials; second, there is no possessive pronoun in the Greek, which would be needed if the women were the wives of the deacons; third, the four qualifications which follow correspond, with appropriate variations, to the first four required of deacons as regards demeanor, government of the tongue, use of wine, and trustworthiness; and fourth, this is a section dealing wholly with Church officials. The reference here is to women who hold the office of deaconess, as Phoebe (Rom. 16:1).

¹⁸ Moss, C. M. (1994). *1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (1 Ti 3:11). Joplin, MO: College Press.

¹⁹ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1 Ti 3:11–12). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

²⁰ Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 4, p. 236). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

The word “grave” is the translation of *semnos* (σεμνος), the same word used of the deacons (v. 8). It speaks of that combination of gravity and dignity which invites the reverence of others. The word “slanderers” is *diabolos* (διαβολος), the word used of the devil. The word comes from *diaballō* (διαβαλλω), which means “to throw over or across, to traduce, calumniate, slander, accuse, defame.” “Sober” is *nēphalion* (νηφαλιον), the same word that is used in connection with a bishop (v. 2). It means, “to be calm, dispassionate, circumspect.” “Faithful” is *pistos* (πιστος), “faithful” in the sense of fidelity, of being true to the trust imposed in one.

Translation. Women, likewise, grave and dignified, not slanderers, calm, dispassionate, and circumspect, faithful in all things.²¹

11 In the Greek language the same word, *gynē*, is used for “woman” and “wife.” Since this single word is found here for “their wives,” there are three possible interpretations as to what group Paul is talking about.

NIV follows KJV in assuming that these women were the wives of the deacons. The main argument against this is that the word for “their” is missing in the Greek. Yet Vine feels that this meaning is “probable.”

Some have suggested that he is speaking of women in general. But the context of vv. 8–12 would seem to rule this out.

White argues strongly that the reference is to deaconesses, of whom Phoebe (Rom 16:1) is an example (EGT, 4:115, 116). He would take these as a separate group of church officials. The same view is maintained by Bernard (pp. 58, 59) and Lock (pp. 40, 41). We know that there were deaconesses in the church in later centuries; but whether there was such an order in the first century is debatable.

Hendriksen takes somewhat of a mediating position. He writes,

They are a group by themselves, not just the wives of the deacons nor *all* the women who belong to the church.... On the other hand, the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, with equal clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third order in the church, the office of ‘deaconesses,’ on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons (pp. 132, 133).

In spite of this weight of scholarly opinion, we are still inclined to favor the idea that the reference is to “their wives.” Paul talks about the qualifications of the deacons in vv. 8–10 and again in vv. 12, 13. It would seem natural to assume that he is talking about their wives in v. 11.

He says that these women—whoever they are—must, “in the same way” as the deacons, be “worthy of respect.” This is the same adjective (*semna*, fem.) as in v. 8 (masc.).

²¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (1 Ti 3:10–11). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

They are also not to be “malicious talkers.” This is one word in Greek, the adjective *diabolos*, which means “slandorous, accusing falsely.” It can well be translated here as “slandorous.” But most versions take it as a substantive (e.g., “slanderers,” KJV). This note was a needed warning in the early church, and is still needed today.

For a discussion of “temperate,” see the comments on v.2. It was necessary that the wives as well as the husbands have this virtue.

“Trustworthy in everything” is a comprehensive requirement. Church workers must not be lax in taking care of their assigned duties.

12 Now Paul returns to the specific qualifications of deacons. He says that the deacon, like the overseer (v. 2), must be the husband of one wife. He must also “manage his children and his household well” (cf. v. 4). The Greek word for “household” (*oikos*) is the same as that translated “family” in v. 4.

13 Those who serve well in their assigned duties in the church are gaining (present tense) for themselves (*heautois*) “an excellent standing” (KJV, “a good degree”). The noun *bathmos* (only here in the NT) literally means “a step,” and so metaphorically “standing” or “rank.” Some think this suggests promotion to a higher rank (e.g., overseer). Others think it means great respect in the eyes of the church. Still others would relate it to good standing in God’s sight. Probably the best interpretation is a combination of the last two.

“Great assurance” in relation to men or in relation to God? Again, why not both? Often a both/and interpretation is more reasonable than an either/or, and is certainly more fruitful. Christian workers should have “an excellent standing and great assurance” in relation to both God and their fellowmen.²²

3:13. Though the position of deacon seems by worldly standards to be menial and unattractive, to close followers of Jesus Christ it looks quite different (cf. John 13:11–17; Mark 10:42–45). Those who fulfill their servant roles faithfully gain two things: first, an excellent standing before fellow Christians who understand and appreciate the beauty of humble, selfless, Christlike service; and second, great assurance (*parrēsia*, “confidence, boldness”) in their faith in Christ Jesus. Humble service, which lacks all the rewards the world deems important, becomes a true test of one’s motives. Here one discovers for himself whether or not his efforts are truly prompted by a Christlike spirit of selfless service. When a deacon has indeed “served well” his ministry builds confidence in the sincerity of his own faith in Christ and of his unhyphocritical approach to God (cf. Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19).²³

²² Earle, R. (1981). 1 Timothy. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Vol. 11, pp. 368–369). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²³ Litfin, A. D. (1985). 1 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 738). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3:13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

The promise offered to those who serve well as deacons may not be quite what humans seek: not financial wealth or even promotion to overseer. Rather Paul promises “excellent standing and great assurance.” “Excellent standing” (βαθμὸν καλόν, *bathmon kalon*) is literally a “good step” and undoubtedly refers to standing before God. “Great assurance” (πολλὴν παρρησίαν, *pollēn parrēsian*) likely refers to the courage and confidence to stand before God and speak. Both of these blessings are to be seen as located “in their faith in Christ Jesus.”²⁴

²⁴ Moss, C. M. (1994). *1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (1 Ti 3:13). Joplin, MO: College Press.