*Sunday, September 17, 2017 pm*

**CAN WOMEN SERVE AS DEACONS?**

This morning we addressed the qualifications and role of deacons as we continue our study of the New Testament church and its leaders. Tonight, we want to discuss an aspect of that role – can women serve as deacons?

This is a controversial subject that is greatly discussed today. Many churches are rethinking the scriptures to expand the role of women in the church. I am convinced that in many instances it begins with the question of deaconesses. So let us consider what the Bible teaches about this subject.

1. **What the Bible teaches**
   1. A deacon is to be the husband of one wife – hence a man. 1 Timothy 3:12. This ought to solve the issue.   
      We could also appeal to Philippians 1:1 which mentions deacons, along with bishops and the saints.   
      And throughout the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the masculine is consistently used (with the exception of vs. 11-12 which deals with their wives (feminine) and children (neuter). Even “houses” (household – NASB) is masculine.
   2. Add to this the consistency in the New Testament of men as leaders in a congregation, (all apostles, all elders, all preacher, all NT writers, etc.) we can see that God intends deacons to be men.
   3. Furthermore, God has given restricted roles for women in worship and teaching men – 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (which is given in a broader sense than just the church), 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 specifically addresses when we are in worship. We have examined these texts in times past and concluded that this is dealing with circumstances where leadership is involved (hence women can sing, etc.).
2. **Arguments advocating women deacons answered**
   1. ***Argument -*** 1 Timothy 3:11 – the Greek word for “wives” (γυνή, gynē) can be “women” or “wives.”   
      *Likewise, {their}* ***wives*** *must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things*. (NKJV, similar in the KJV) (emp. mine, including “their” is added for flow – TT)

***Women*** *must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things*. (NASB, also similar in the ASV) .  
Thus this verse gives the qualifications of women who are serving as deaconesses (female deacons).   
***Answer***:

* + 1. It is true that the same word is used for women and wives. In fact, the word is used some 220+ times and is fairly evenly divided between the two. Most texts are clear on the distinction.   
       Checking numerous English versions they are split on translations (and it has nothing to do with which Greek manuscript they use).
    2. This text does NOT make a distinction, so either English word would be a proper translation. THAT leaves us with the CONTEXT. And when put in context, the better translation is “wives”. Why?
       1. Because of the previous observations about male leaders, including the use of deacon as an office in Philippians 1:1, and here in 1 Tim. 3:8, 12, 10 & 13 (the verb form translated to serve as deacons)
       2. Because vs. 12 notes that deacons are to be the husband of one wife. IF, vs. 11 means women, why is a husband not mentioned? Do only the male “deacons” have to be married?
       3. Because the context, BOTH before and after refers to a man serving as a deacon. It would be strange to interrupt this and insert the role of a woman (deaconess) in the midst of the qualifications of male deacons.
       4. Because vs. 11 does NOT use the word “deacon” for the wife mentioned.
       5. Some have also asked, if Paul meant deaconess, why not combine both into one group of qualifications rather than distinguishing them? (E.g. “Let both men and women serving as deacons be…”)
       6. Furthermore, since Paul is addressing deacons (and previously elders) who must be married, it is logical that he addresses the demeanor of their wives. The qualities described in vs. 11 would be crucial for a leader’s wife to possess if he is to be effective in his work. The “likewise” or “in the same manner” means “similarly” and shows their godly qualities working with their appointed husband.
  1. Romans 16:1-2 – Phoebe
     1. ***The argument***: Along with the above passage, they turn to Romans 16:1, *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea*,   
        The word servant is διάκονον, (diakonon), the feminine form of the word translated “deacon” in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8 & 12. Thus Phoebe was a deaconess.
     2. But consider the following:
        1. The word διάκονος (diakonos) is found 30 times in the New Testament, 27 times it is translated either ***servant or minister***. ***This is the primary meaning of the word.***   
           The word is even used to describe those who may not be believers (cf. Romans 13:4 – God’s minister – speaking of governing authorities; Matthew 22:13 – a king’s servants; 2 Corinthians 11:15 – Satan’s ministers, etc.)  
           Its verb counterpart (διακονέω, diakoneō) is used 37 times and is usually translated, serves or ministered (including 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 – serve adding - as deacons)
        2. ***All Christians are to be servants*** – Matthew 23:11 – who is greatest, let him be your servant; Galatians 5:13 – through love serve one another; Hebrews 6:10 – you have ministered to the saints and do minister; 1 Peter 4:10-11 – if anyone ministers, etc.
        3. ***Any official designation are borne out in their context*** – this is the case in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8 & 12.
        4. ***The context of Romans 16:1-2 does not necessitate that it be an office.*** It could simply describe Phoebe as one who served (as a Christian) in the church at Cenchrea. Paul could simply be stating that as a Christian coming to Rome, they ought to recognize and assist her as they would any brother OR sister in Christ.   
           In fact, Paul in describing her in vs 2 said, “…*for she has also been a* ***helper*** *of many, and of myself as well.*”
  2. Some might contend that women can serve as deaconess because it is a position of service and not one of teaching (as in preachers, elders and apostles).
     1. The office of deacon is certainly different than the other offices and functionaries in that it is about helping the elders accomplish what needs to be done, so that they can focus on spiritual matters.
     2. The fact that it is an office gives concern with 1 Timothy 2:12 which says, *And I do not permit a woman* ***to teach or to have authority over a man****, but to be in silence.*  Being an office means that it comes with authority. Thus there is this concern.
  3. NOTE: The case for women serving as deacons is indicative of a larger problem – the unwillingness of women AND MEN to submit to God’s pattern. It is a creeping in the direction toward feminism and assuming further roles, including leadership. Friends, this is already happening!   
     As I was preparing this lesson, I was directed to a website, [www.gal328.com](http://www.gal328.com) that advocates women, not only as deacons, but also as elders and preachers. This is a website about churches of Christ who have released statements on gender inclusiveness. At present, there are 8 (professed) churches of Christ whose statements are included on this site. The site also has a list of “gender inclusive churches of Christ” including 6 in California (57 in the US). These are churches that have made open statements of inclusiveness at various levels. Some are “working toward” further progression.

1. **What can women do?**
   1. Women are NOT second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. Galatians 3:28 notes that we are all one in Christ (though this text is misinterpreted to say that women can now do anything men can do). But God has placed limitations upon them – including leadership roles in the church, work and in the home.
   2. There are examples of godly women serving in noticeable ways. Time will permit a detailed examination of the details but I mention these that we may know women are needed in God’s plans and have a work to do.
      1. Philip had 4 daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:9, cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1-6)
      2. Philippians 4:2-3 – where Paul implores Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony. In vs. 3 he notes they had shared in his struggles for the cause of the gospel
      3. Romans 16:3 – Priscilla helped Aquila in correcting Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). Paul recognized them as fellow workers
      4. Romans 16:6-7 – Mary labored among them and Junia was of note among the apostles.
      5. Romans 16:12 - Tryphena and Tryphosa both labored in the Lord.
   3. I am convinced that 1 Timothy 2:15 which says, *Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control,* is a reference to her fulfilling her role, whatever that might be.
   4. So what are some things women can do to serve and help the church grow?
      1. They can assist in teaching unbelievers the truth (cf. Acts 18:26) – again Priscilla.
      2. They can teach women and children – Titus 2:3-5 calls upon older women to teach younger women. How many problems are prevalent in the church today because of a failure in this?
      3. Visit the fatherless and widows – James 1:27 (all can do this)
      4. Do whatever the elders ask of them (Hebrews 13:17) within the boundaries God has established. NOTE: There are some tasks best handled by women (encouraging a woman who is struggling, dealing with feminine matters, etc.)
      5. They can be hospitable (as with all)
      6. They can be an encouragement to both brothers and sisters in Christ.
      7. Like everyone, they can invite others to services, etc.

Today we have been studying about deacons. In this lesson we seen that they must be men who meet the qualities of 1 Timothy 3:8-12. Let us accept and respect God’s pattern in these matters as well.