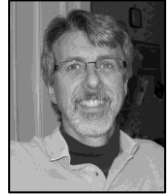


Deaconesses

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Introduction

The first time that I remember seeing a deaconess was over twenty years ago. My wife, Wendy, and I were visiting my brother Hugh at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton for the weekend. On Sunday morning and evening, we went with him to the Baptist Church that he was attending. The service was conducted very professionally and the message was positive to the extreme.

After the morning service was over, a woman came up to us who walked with an air of authority. We were introduced to her by a man who had invited Hugh to the church some weeks before. He told this woman that he had invited Hugh and now Hugh had brought two more with him! He was very pleased with what he had done and seemed to be seeking approval from this lady! I noticed that this lady had a tag on her dress that read “deaconess” and also included her name, I believe.

This was my first encounter with a deaconess that I can recall. In the Baptist Church that I grew up in I had never heard of a deaconess. We had a pastor and a board of deacons, which were all men. I had never heard of a woman being a deacon or a deaconess. I didn’t think much more about this until I went to Toronto Baptist Seminary and began to study the Scriptures in-depth both as a student and as a pastor.

In one of our courses, we had to write an essay and do research on both elders and deacons and their roles and qualifications. It was then that I began to realize further that the biblical model of church leadership was that of elders and deacons. In my exegesis, I was very surprised to discover that there was a case to be made for women to serve as deaconesses.¹ I also came to

¹ I realize that in many Baptist churches the deacons function as overseers rather than the biblical pattern that is laid down in Scripture. The lady at the Baptist Church in Fredericton was called a deaconess but was functioning as an elder. I am completely

realize that, historically, deaconesses served in the churches and that there were Confessions of Faith that included women as deaconesses. Furthermore, there are many conservative, evangelical churches today that have women functioning as deaconesses.

In this paper, I want to propose that qualified women may serve as deaconesses in local churches provided that the scriptural pattern of elders and deacons is followed.

I. Local Church Order – The Offices of Elder and Deacon

One of the important themes in 1 Timothy has to do with behavior or conduct in the church of the living God. We read in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, “(v. 14) I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, (v. 15) if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”² An essential aspect of this conduct or behavior in the local church is the necessity of the offices of overseers³ and deacons along with scriptural qualifications (3:1-13).

The qualifications for overseers [*episkopos*]/elders [*presbuteros*] are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The office is a noble one and the standards are high. The quality of a man’s character is vital for this office. Too often Christians look first to a man’s outward attainments in education and financial success before they consider a man’s heart. The elder must have a good home life with his family. If he cannot manage his home, he has no right to attempt to

opposed to women functioning in this role when the deacons/deaconesses are functioning as the overseers of the church. This is not scriptural.

² Unless otherwise stated all Scripture quotations are taken from the *ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) Copyright © 2008 by Crossway. All rights reserved.

³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to show that the terms of overseer, elder, and pastor are used interchangeably in the New Testament to speak of the same office and the roles within that office. However, I will note a few thoughts. In Titus 1:5, Paul had instructed Titus to appoint elders in every town. However in verse 7, he calls the *elder* an *overseer*. There are two more sections of Scripture that prove this. We read in Acts 20:17, “*Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.*” Here, we find that Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus. However, we read later in Acts 20:28, “*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*” Again, we notice that the elders were the overseers. The last section of Scripture that we will consider is found in 1 Peter 5. We read in 1 Peter 5:1, “*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed . . .*” Here we see that Peter is writing to the elders but notice what he says in 1 Peter 5:2. We read, “*Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly . . .*” Again, we see that the elders were serving as overseers and that these titles refer to the one office.

manage the church. He must also be able to teach the Word of God. It is very clear from the qualifications and the previous context (2:11-15) that overseers must be men.

Next, we find a list of qualifications for the office of deacon [*diakonos*]⁴ in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. There are similarities between the qualifications for overseers and deacons. Deacons must also be men of inward character and they must be able to manage their homes well. One qualification that is different is that there is no mention of the necessity of being able to teach, though deacons do have to hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (3:9). At first glance, it would also seem that the office of deacon is for men only. However, when one begins to do exegesis, we see that there is a need for interpretation in the exegesis.

II. Difficulties in Translating *Gunaikas* in 1 Timothy 3:11

The difficulty begins when we consider 1 Timothy 3:11, which reads, “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but soberminded, faithful in all things”. The difficulty lies in how to translate *gunh*.

1. The Greek Word *Gunh*

What must be realized is that translators struggle to know, with certainty, how to translate the Greek word *gunh* in this passage. The Greek transliteration reads, “*Gynaikas hosautos semnas me diabolous nephaliouis pistas en pasin.*” A literal translation of this text would be, “Women [or wives], likewise, are to be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” *Gunh* is found 215 times in the New Testament and is translated woman or women 120 times and wife or wives 70 times in the New International Version. Walter Bauer breaks down the use of *gunh* in the New Testament in four ways, namely, “1. of an adult female . . . , 2. wife . . . , 3. . . . bride . . . , 4. on the women in heaven”⁵ Thus, in this instance, *gunh* may be translated as either “wives” or “women”. The translators have to make a choice in this matter because it is not explicitly clear whom Paul is addressing.

2. Differences in Translations Reveal That It Is a Matter of Interpretation

Some Bible versions have translated *gunh* as wives. We read in the English Standard Version, “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things”; and we read in the NIV, “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” One will notice, how-

⁴ *Diakonos* is used three times in 1 Timothy (3:8, 12; 4:6).

⁵ Walter Bauer, second edition revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957, this edition, 1979), 168.

ever, that there is a footnote after the word wives in the NIV. The footnote shows an alternate translation that reads deaconesses rather than wives.

Other Bible versions have translated *gunh* as women. We read in the New American Standard Bible, “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things”; and we read in *The Amplified Bible*, “[The] women likewise must be worthy of respect and serious, not gossipers, but temperate and self-controlled, [thoroughly] trustworthy in all things.” In both these translations, the translators opted for the English word women rather than wives. So, we see that there are differences of interpretations even among Greek New Testament evangelical scholars.

III. Why I Choose to Interpret *Gunh* As Women

There are a number of reasons why I choose to interpret *gunh* as “women” rather than “wives”. It has to do with the overall structure of the text of 1 Timothy 3, the addition of the word “their” to the English translations, the absence of qualifications for the wives of elders, the qualification for elders and deacons to have well managed homes would seem to cover godly wives, and finally there was a reason that Paul did not use the word deaconess.

1. Structure

I am most influenced in my present position because of the structure of 1 Timothy 3:1-13. In verse 3, we are introduced to the overseers [elders] and then qualifications follow. In verse 8, we are introduced to the deacons by the phrase “*Diakonous hosautos semnous*”, which translated says, “Deacons likewise are to be grave.” This makes it obvious that there is some connection with what was said in regards to the qualifications of overseers. The overseers must be and live a certain way and the deacons must be and live a certain way. What struck me was that the same structure is found in verse 11! Verse 11 reads in the Greek, “*Gynaikas hosautos semnas*”, which may be translated as “Women [wives] likewise are to be grave”.

The structure reveals that the apostle Paul is addressing an entirely different group! He is not addressing the deacons or their wives. William Hendriksen makes that abundantly clear when he writes,

That these women are not “the wives of the deacons” nor “all the adult female members of the church” is clear from the syntax: “The overseer must be Deacons similarly (must be) Women similarly (must be)” One and the same verb coordinates the three: the overseer, deacons, women. Hence, these women are here viewed as rendering special service in the church, as do the elders

and the deacons. They are a group by themselves, not just the wives of the deacons nor all the women who belong to the church.⁶

Hendriksen knows that these women are not the wives of the deacons.⁷ Because of the structure, Thomas R. Schreiner, takes this one step further when he says, “Paul introduces the women mentioned here in the same fashion he introduced the men in 1 Timothy 3:8, i.e., he uses the word likewise. In 3:1-7, Paul lays out the qualifications for elders, and in 3:8 Paul says likewise there are similar qualifications for deacons. The likewise in 3:11 suggests that the qualifications for men who are deacons also apply to women deacons.”⁸ Thus, the structure of the text is extremely important in how I would translate and interpret the text in favour of deaconesses or women deacons.

2. Scholars Must Insert the Word “Their” in the Translations

A second reason why I believe that Paul is speaking of deaconesses is that, if Paul was referring to the deacons wives, one would expect to find a qualifier such as *auvtwn* in the Greek text.⁹ However, it is absent. In other words, “their” is not even “there”. As James B. Hurley notes, “Translations wishing to adopt the meaning ‘wives’ have generally supplied one of the two words. The biblical text offers no support for this.”¹⁰

In some of the translations, “their” is italicized to show that it is an insertion. Thus, for the passage to make sense in English, the translators have had to insert a word that is not even in the Greek text. It seems to me that it would have been very easy for Paul to include such a qualifier and its absence is noteworthy. Samuel M. Ngewa agrees with my conclusion when he writes, “While it is impossible to be dogmatic on the point, the fact that ‘their’ is omitted and the lack of corresponding instructions for elders’ wives

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, Fourth Printing, 2007), 132.

⁷ Hendriksen states that Paul, “. . . regards these women as the deacon’s assistants in helping the poor and the needy, etc. These are women who render auxiliary service, performing ministries for which women are better adapted.” Hendriksen, 132-233.

⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching”, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 213.

⁹ Mounce refers to this argument in favor of deaconesses in his commentary, though he himself is not of this opinion. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 204.

¹⁰ James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 230.

provides grounds for assuming that Paul is talking about a group of women leaders, equivalent to deaconesses.”¹¹

3. No Explicit Qualifications for the Wives of Elders

Furthermore, when we compare the qualifications of elders and deacons, one notices that there are no qualifications for the wives of elders. It seems strange to me that there would be qualifications for the wives of deacons but no qualifications for the wives of elders! As Thomas Schreiner notes, “Another argument in favour of women deacons is that Paul says nothing about the wives of elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Such an omission is hard to explain if he is speaking of the wives of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11. One would expect that higher qualifications would be demanded of wives of elders than of wives of deacons.”¹² I agree.

Surprisingly, some argue that the wives of elders have nothing to do with assisting their husbands and that is why there are no qualifications for them. In my opinion, that is a very weak argument. The wives of elders have much to do in assisting their husbands. One of the qualifications for elders is that they be hospitable. Surely, their wives would be very involved in this area of ministry and would often share most of the load. Both elders and deacons would find it very difficult to carry out their ministries if they did not have godly wives helping them.

4. Both Elders and Deacons Must Have Well Managed Homes

I would think that when it says that both elders and deacons must have well managed homes that it would cover qualifications for wives. Obviously, if one’s wife was not a godly woman, a man would be disqualified from the office of elder or deacon (3:4, 12). Thus, it would be absolutely essential for a wife of an elder or deacon to be an example to the rest of the women of the church. The wives of the elders and deacons in our local church are godly women and certainly enhance the ministries of their husbands.

5. Why Paul Did Not Use a Greek Word for Deaconess

Finally, some might find it strange that Paul did not use the Greek word for deaconess in 1 Timothy 3:11. There is a reason that the Greek word for deaconess does not appear. John MacArthur explains the reason, when he says,

To avoid confusion, why didn’t Paul refer to those women as deaconesses? Because there’s no Greek word for that. Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16:1 because there’s no feminine form of *diakonos*. The only other word Paul could have used would have

¹¹ Samuel M. Ngewa, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Africa Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 76.

¹² Thomas R. Schreiner, 214, endnote 2, 503-504.

been *diakonos*, but we would not have known that he was referring to women. Clearly Paul introduced another category of deacons: what we have come to know as deaconesses. I prefer to call them women deacons because that maintains the New Testament terminology.¹³

Paul did not use the Greek word for deaconess because there wasn't one! William Mounce verifies this when he states, "The feminine form of the word *diakonos* (*diakonissa*) had not yet been created."¹⁴ Thus, for me, the evidence leans heavily towards translating *gunh* as "women" rather than "wives". However, there is weightier evidence, in my opinion, in another of Paul's writings.

IV. Phoebe Is Called a *Diakonos* in Romans 16

Another reason why I believe that women are called to serve as deaconesses is because in Romans 16:1, a woman by the name of Phoebe is called a *diakonos*. We read in Romans 16:1-2, "(v. 1) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, (v. 2) 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." Verse 1 tells us that Phoebe was a "servant [*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchrea"! There are reasons from the text why I believe that *diakonos* should be translated as deacon/deaconess rather than servant.

The first thing that we notice is that Paul highly commended [*sunisthmi*]¹⁵ Phoebe. Paul commends Phoebe as a sister, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, and a patron of many including Paul. He exhorts the Romans to welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints. He tells them to help her in whatever she may need from them. Indeed, because of this commendation and for other reasons, many think that Phoebe delivered Paul's epistle to the Roman Christians! William Hendriksen is typical when he writes, "It is reasonable to believe that it was Phoebe who, in departing for Rome, carried Paul's letter with her and delivered it to its destination. Some manuscripts even make mention of this in a subscript."¹⁶ Surely, Phoebe would have to be someone of great reputation for Paul to trust with his epistle.

¹³ John MacArthur, "Qualified Servants for the Church – Deacons, Part 2", <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/54-26/Qualified-Servants-for-the-Church-Deacons-Part-2>.

¹⁴ William D. Mounce, 202.

¹⁵ *Sunisthmi* is found three times in Romans (3:5; 5:8; 16:1).

¹⁶ William Hendriksen, *Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1980, 1981), 499.

1. Phoebe Was a “*Diakonos*” of the Church of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1)

Paul calls Phoebe a *diakonos*. This is the same word that is found in 1 Timothy 3:8.

At the very least Phoebe is to be viewed as an exceptional servant of the Lord because of her service. What is very noteworthy is that Paul connects her with a specific church. She is a servant of the church in Cenchrea [*diakonon tes ekklesias tes en Kenchreais*]. When Paul connects her with the church in Cenchrea, it certainly gives the sense that she had some kind of special ministry there. She was not just a servant of the Lord; she was a servant of “the church in Cenchrea”. Geoffrey Wilson would agree that there is some significance to this when he says, “Although the question cannot be decided with certainty, the fact that she is introduced as ‘a servant’ of the church at Cenchrea lends support to the view that she served it in the official capacity of ‘deaconess’” (ASV margin).¹⁷

Furthermore, this is the only reference in the entire New Testament that calls someone, male or female, a *diakonos* of a particular church! There are one hundred references in the family of words related to *diakonos*. The family of words consists of *diakonos*, *diakonew* and *diakonia*. In examining all these references, I discovered that Christians are often called servants of Christ but *only* Phoebe is explicitly called a servant of a particular church!¹⁸ That, to me, is somewhat significant and suggests that she was more than just a servant in the way that we understand servant. If any man had been called a *diakonos* of a particular church, translators would have been quick to state that he was a deacon of the church at Cenchrea.

2. Phoebe Was a Patron of Many (Romans 16:2)

Furthermore, Paul uses another very high title for Phoebe. He calls her a patron [*prostatis*]¹⁹ of many and of himself. Phoebe had been a tremendous help to many in the church in Cenchrea and also to the apostle Paul. The word used for helper is very unique and is only found here in the New Testament. W. E. Vine says of patron,

a feminine form of *prostates*, denotes a protectress, patroness; it is used metaphorically of Phoebe in Roman. 16:2. It is a word of dignity, evidently chosen instead of others which might have been used (see, e.g., under Helper), and indicates the high esteem with which she was regarded, as one who had been a protectress of many. *Prostates* was the title of a citizen in Athens, who had the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of resident aliens who were

¹⁷ Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Romans* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 242.

¹⁸ A possible exception is Colossians 1:25, where Paul speaks of himself as *diakonos* of the church, but I think he is referring to the entire body of Christ and makes the application to the church at Colosse.

¹⁹ Bauer defines *prostatis* as “protectress, patroness, helper”, 718.

without civic rights. Among the Jews it signified a wealthy patron of the community.²⁰

Whatever the case, the use of this word to describe Phoebe reveals that she was a very significant person in the church of Cenchrea. It is very likely that Phoebe was someone of considerable wealth who used what she had as a blessing to others. No wonder Paul commends her highly. Because of the way Paul addresses Phoebe, I believe that she had an important position in the church as a deaconess. Simon J. Kistemaker would agree when he says, “In the harbor city of Cenchrea some believers founded a church in which Phoebe was a deaconess (Rom. 16:1).”²¹

V. There Is No Work in the Office of Deacon That Would Prohibit Women from Functioning As Deaconesses

When we have the proper distinction between elders and deacons in the church, is there any reason why women cannot serve as deaconesses? The elders are responsible for the oversight of the church as I see it in the New Testament. They rule, they lead, and they teach in the local church. It is clear that women cannot serve in that office. They are prohibited. However, deacons are called to serve and to help the elders from being distracted from their ministry of the Word and prayer. The diaconal ministry is one of compassion and care for the sick and the needy. There is no explicit prohibition that would prevent women from serving in this capacity. John Piper agrees with me, when he says,

There is no reason why (as I read the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3) women cannot be deacons. The elders are men and are charged with the governance and teaching of the church (according to 1 Timothy 2:12; 3:2 and 5:17), but the diaconate does not bear that same responsibility. And deacons are charged with the kind of ministries of mercy described, for example, in Matthew 25:44 – feeding the hungry, taking in the refugee, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned. All these are “diaconal” (*diekonesamen*). And, of course, there are more. This fits with the way Paul describes Phoebe at the end of verse 2: “for she has been a patron (a helper, a servant) of many and of myself as well.”²²

²⁰ W. E. Vine, *W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, vol. 4 (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), 88-89.

²¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1990), 656.

²² John Piper, “Rethinking the Governance Structure at Bethlehem Baptist Church – A Biblical Examination of Key Terms, Revised 4/27/2000, August 13, 1987”,

There are two extremes that we must avoid. We must avoid being conformed to the world in regards to the feminist movement, but on the other hand we must avoid over-reacting to the feminist movement and so prohibit women from serving in areas where they are not forbidden. Philip Ryken also notes this, when he states, “If the problem with feminist theology has been its failure to submit to divine order, the traditional church has often failed to employ the gifts of women to their full biblical extent.”²³

VI. Anabaptist and Baptist Confessions of Faith Reveal That Some of Our Forefathers Recognized Deaconesses

While we must always begin with Scripture, it is also important for us to consider how godly men and women in other generations understood the teachings of Holy Scripture. As Charles Spurgeon once said, “The only thing that is new is heresy.” I am not sure if I could go quite that far, but it is important to consider if there is any historical precedent for deaconesses. Historically, some of our fathers of the faith had women deacons or deaconesses serving in the churches.

1. Anabaptist Confessions of Faith

i) *The Dordrecht Confession of 1632*. This is the most influential of all Mennonite confessions. In this confession, a rather large section is given to the election and offices of teachers, deacons, and deaconesses in the church. They believed that elders were to be appointed in the churches and they had responsibility for the oversight of the churches. They also believed that all the circuits should be well supplied with deacons and “. . . that honorable old widows should be chosen as deaconesses”²⁴. Some of their responsibilities were to “. . . visit, comfort, and take care of the poor, the weak, afflicted, and the needy, as also to visit, comfort, and take care of the widows and orphans”²⁵.

Thus in this confession, they recognized the offices of elders, deacons, and deaconesses.

2. Pioneer English Separatist-Baptist Confessions

i) John Smyth wrote a *Short Confession Of Faith* in 1609. He made mention of bishops whose main responsibility was to dispense both the Word and

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1987/1491_Rethinking_the_Governance_Structure_at_Bethlehem_Baptist_Church/.

²³ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 134.

²⁴ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1959), 73.

²⁵ Lumpkin, 73.

the sacraments. He also mentioned deacons, “. . . men and widows, who attend to the affairs of the poor and sick brethren”.²⁶

ii) *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland, 1611*. This declaration observed two offices. We read, “That the officers off everie Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their soules, Act. 20.28, Pet. 5.2,3. Or Deacons Men, and Women who by their office releave the necessities off the poore and impotent brethren concerning their bodies, Acts. 6.1-4.”²⁷ Thus, we see that women served as deacons among this group of brethren.

iii) *Propositions and Conclusions Concerning True Christian Religion, 1612-1614*. This confession recognized two sorts of ministers, namely that of pastors/teachers/elders and that of deacons who were both men and women. We read concerning deacons, “. . . Deacons, men and women: whose ministry is, to serve tables and wash the saints’ feet (Acts vi. 2-4; Phil. i. I; I Tim. iii. 2, 3, 8, 11, and chap. v.)”²⁸

iv) *Confession Of Faith And Ecclesiastical Principles Of The Evangelical Association Of French-Speaking Baptist Churches, 1879 and 1924*. These French speaking Baptist churches also recognized deaconesses. We read, “In addition to pastors or elders, the local church may have other responsible servants, for example deacons and deaconesses whose role it is to assist the pastors or elders in their ministry, by assuming especial responsibility for everything that relates to the material interests of the congregation.”²⁹

From these Confessions of Faith, we understand that some of our forefathers in the faith recognized deaconesses or women deacons. We also will discover that there are many Reformed and conservative evangelicals who adhere to the historic, orthodox Christian faith that have deaconesses or women deacons in their church.

VII. Two Present Day Conservative, Evangelical Churches That Have Deaconesses or Women Deacons

Two very influential pastors in the English speaking world today are John Piper and John MacArthur.³⁰ They are both orthodox in the faith and have

²⁶ Lumpkin, 101.

²⁷ Lumpkin, 121-122.

²⁸ Lumpkin, 138.

²⁹ The first French Baptist Confession was drawn up by the American missionary, Erasmus Willard, and published at Douai in 1848. With the assistance of some French brethren, Willard prepared a second Confession a few years later. Six French preachers, led by A. Ramseyer and H. Andru, produced a third Confession in 1879. This was the first independently prepared Confession of French Baptists, and it was published at Chauny. <http://www.reformedreader.org/cc/fbconf.htm>.

³⁰ Another exploration here could be Timothy Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City.

had a great influence for good upon the evangelical church. Both of the churches that they pastor have women who function as women deacons or deaconesses.

1. Bethlehem Baptist Church, Pastor John Piper

In the Church Constitution and By-Laws, under “Article II Church Government”, we find a general statement in regards to the officers of the local church. We read,

a. Officers. The Officers of the Church shall be a Council of Elders and the Deacons. Officers shall be called to office by vote of the membership of the Church as provided for in Article II, Section 2 and Section 3 of these By-Laws. All officers of the Church shall be members of the Church in good and regular standing. The Council of Elders shall be composed of men only, *the Deacons may be composed of both men and/or women*. Except as provided in paragraphs (b) and (c) below, the Council of Elders and the Deacons are the only bodies and positions created by these By-Laws.³¹

Thus, it is clear that the deacons may be both men and/or women at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Next, we will consider Grace Community Church.

2. Grace Community Church, Pastor John Macarthur

In the Church Constitution and By-laws of Grace Community Church, under ARTICLE VII, Other Councils and Committees, Section 3. Deaconesses, we read,

The Deaconesses shall consist of members possessing the qualifications described in 1 Timothy 3:11 and Titus 2:3-5 and shall be nominated by members of the church. The Board of Elders will compile and confirm the nominations and submit the names to the members for affirmation at the annual meeting. The Deaconesses shall serve for a term of one (1) year. They shall prepare the Communion elements, assist the Pastor at baptismal services and in the general spiritual care of the church, and shall assist in the care of the sick and needy. A Deaconess shall be dignified, not a malicious gossip, temperate, and faithful in all things.³²

Again, we discover that a very conservative congregation at Grace Community Church has deaconesses.

³¹ Bethlehem Baptist Church, <http://www.hopeingod.org/document/constitution-and-laws>. Italics mine.

³² Grace Community Church, 13248 Roscoe Boulevard, Sun Valley, CA 91352, <http://www.gracechurch.org/about/resources/?topic=Bylaws& year=0000>.

VIII. Conclusion

After spending considerable time exegeting these passages, considering church history, and pondering this issue for some twenty years both as a student and as a pastor, I believe that women may serve as deaconesses in a local church where scriptural church government is practised. I conclude with the words of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “A living church cannot do without Deaconesses as its organs for doing good. Deaconesses cannot do without the church as the appointed organization for doing good in the world.”³³

³³ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Deaconess as a Part of the Church”, *Our Church Work* (1903), in Ronald G. Lutzens, “B.B. Warfield on Women Deacons”, *Presbyterian Journal* (May 15, 1985): 8, in Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 134.

Appendix: Word Study of *Diakonos*

The masculine noun *diakonos*,³⁴ is found twenty-nine times in the New Testament as follows;

Mt 20:26, "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."

Mt 22:13, "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Mt 23:11, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant."

Mk 9:35, "And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.'"

Mk 10:43, "But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."

Jn 2:5, "His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'"

Jn 2:9, "And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom."

Jn 12:26, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

Rom 13:4, ". . . for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

Rom 15:8, "For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers."

Rom 16:1, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea."

1 Cor 3:5, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one."

2 Cor 3:6, ". . . who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

2 Cor 6:4, ". . . but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses."

³⁴ Two Greek words that are related to *diakonos* are *diakonew* and *diakonia*. They are found thirty-seven times and thirty-four times respectfully. This makes a total of ninety-eight references in the Greek New Testament.

2 Cor 11:15, “Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.”

2 Cor 11:23, “Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.”

Gal 2:17, “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!”

Eph 3:7, “. . . of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.”

Eph 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.”

Phil 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.”

Col 1:7, “. . . just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf.”

Col 1:23, “. . . if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”

Col 1:25, “Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.”

Col 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.”

1 Tm 3:8, “Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain.”

1 Tm 3:12, “Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.”

1 Tm 4:6, “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

Walter Bauer breaks down *diakonos* in the following manner, “1. masc. – a. servant of someone . . . b. gener. helper . . . c. deacon as an official of the church . . . 2. fem. – a. helper, agent . . . b. deaconess . . .”³⁵

³⁵ Walter Bauer, *diakonos*, 184-185.

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