

1 TIMOTHY 3:11

DEACONESSES

“Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”¹

Paul did not write the missives included in Scripture in order to generate controversy among the churches of the Twenty-first Century; nevertheless, his letters have managed to challenge the professed people of God repeatedly in this day late in the Age of Grace. In particular, his statements defining the role of women among the churches [e.g. **1 TIMOTHY 2:9-15**] challenge modern cultural perceptions. In the text today, we encounter yet another controversial passage challenging contemporary cultural norms, just as they challenged ancient cultural norms.

The text for this day has in great measure proved controversial among contemporary Christians because we modern believers are too often guilty of imposing our own cultural views on what God has caused to be written. Rather than accepting that the Word of God is to inform our modern culture, we imagine that we can impose our own preferences on the instruction God has provided in His Word. Consequently, we filter what has been written through our cultural lenses, unaware of the distortions we force upon the Word. It appears that we modern Christians are more concerned with our perception of the Word than with the intent of the Author of the Word; we are more focused on what the Word means to us than we are on what the Word means. The truth of this charge becomes abundantly evident in most Bible studies whenever a leader asks, “What does this verse mean to you?” I cannot stress too strongly—it is immaterial what the verse under consideration means to you, to me or to any other individual studying the verse. What matters is what God intended when the Spirit superintended the writing of the verse; and discerning the intent of Him who gave the Word is the task of the wise student of the Word.

Evangelical Christians are not immune to reactionary thinking. Too many contemporary church practises arise out of ecclesiastical reactionism. In light of laissez-faire attitudes prevailing among far too many of the professed saints of God, in far too many instances we undoubtedly react against what because we deem what is written to be excessive or intrusive—we whine that it is too hard to obey the Word! In other instances, we are blinded by the accumulation of “things” or by the acquisition of wealth; thus, we are no longer capable of viewing matters from God’s perspective. Often, fundamental Christians react against the casual dismissal of righteousness by those of a progressive bent—there seems almost to be an attitude within evangelicalism that says, “If liberal Christians are for a particular action, we are against it.” Reactionary thinking can be—and often is—as errant as the excess that prompted it in the first place. In the effort to recapture what is imagined to be the high ground, the reactionary overshoots the goal and hardens in an extreme position relative to that previously occupied.

Let there be no misunderstanding—I do not believe women should be elders, nor do I believe they should occupy the office of a deacon *as it is currently understood and practised*. This says more of our theological confusion than it does about the complexity of the Word. If we view the offices as outlined in the Word, we will avoid much of the debate swirling around church governance. If we do business as usual, we will continue to meet the same issues that drain the energies of the churches about us. To the Word and the God who gave it.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

WOMEN, WIVES OR DEACONESSSES? — As mentioned, the text presents a controversy among contemporary Christians. The original language designates neither wives or deaconesses, reading simply, “Women—in like manner...”² There is no definite article in the original tongue, leaving the translator to interpret what Paul could have meant. The English Standard Version, which I use, does understand that Paul was giving instructions for the wives of those appointed as deacons. “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things” [1 TIMOTHY 3:11]. In this understanding, the translators are joined by a number of other translators, including such noteworthy translations as the venerable King James Version, the New English Bible,³ the New International Version,⁴ God’s Word Translation,⁵ the New International Reader’s Vision,⁶ the NET Bible⁷ and the Holman Christian Standard Version.⁸

Because Paul does not specifically state who the women are that are under scrutiny, a growing number of churches have concluded that he must have meant to include women as deacons. Again, some contemporary translations have adopted this same view, including such recent efforts as The Message⁹ and The Revised English Bible.¹⁰ Representative of these translations, one would read, “Women in this office must likewise be...”¹¹

Other translators have simply adopted the reading as presented in the autographs, simply referring to “women,” including, in some instances, a footnote indicating that the reference may possibly be understood as referring either to wives or to female deacons, depending upon the translators’ preference. Among the translations adopting this rendering are such efforts as the American Standard Version, Wuest,¹² the New Revised Standard Version,¹³ the New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update,¹⁴ Today’s New International Version,¹⁵ the New Century Version,¹⁶ the New International Version (2011)¹⁷ and even the Catholic New American Bible.¹⁸

The challenge facing the translator as well as confronting the expositor is to determine whether the Apostle was speaking of women as women, speaking of the wives of deacons or whether he had in view female deacons? We need to think this issue through so that we can be better equipped to honour the Word and Him who gave the Word. The issue is too important to gloss over; it demands that we treat seriously each possibility rather than giving a cursory glance and passing on. The matter could easily prove divisive to the people of God if we fail to seek the mind of the Lord, permitting His Spirit to direct our thoughts.

² Robert Young, **Young’s Literal Translation** (Logos Bible Software, Bellingham, WA 1997)

³ **The New English Bible** (Oxford University Press; Cambridge University Press, New York, NY 1970)

⁴ **The Holy Bible: New International Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1984)

⁵ **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

⁶ **New International Reader’s Vision**, 1st ed. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1998)

⁷ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press 2006)

⁸ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)

⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

¹⁰ **The Revised English Bible** (Cambridge University Press, New York, NY; Melbourne; Cape Town; São Paulo; Delhi; Dubai; Tokyo 1996)

¹¹ Op. cit., **REB**

¹² Kenneth S. Wuest, **The New Testament: An Expanded Translation** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1961)

¹³ **The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1989)

¹⁴ **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (The Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)

¹⁵ **The Holy Bible: Today’s New International Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2005)

¹⁶ **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 2005)

¹⁷ **The New International Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011)

¹⁸ **New American Bible, Revised Edition** (The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC 2011)

First off, we must consider the possibility that Paul used the term *gunaikas* in referral to women in general. Frankly, that possibility doesn't appear feasible for several reasons, the most significant of which is that Paul has interrupted his presentation on standards for the diaconate. If Paul suddenly introduced new criteria for the women of the congregation, he did so in an irrational fashion, breaking up his train of thought; such would be out of character for Paul. If the Apostle was precipitously introducing a new concept concerning the women of the congregation, it would mean that he would have clearly spoken of the criteria for deacons in verses eight through ten, interjected a new thought concerning criteria for women of the assembly before again taking up the matter of standards for deacons. At best, such an effort would be disjointed; it would assuredly be out of character for Paul, who presented sharply reasoned arguments throughout his writings whatever the topic under discussion.

All women as women are considered in what the Apostle wrote in 2:9 ff., and the Apostle was quite precise in ensuring that readers understood his intent at that point in his missive. He was quite clear in speaking of the wives of elders in 3:2, just as he will be clear concerning the wives of deacons in 3:12. While I don't want to appear cavalier, it seems apparent that we can dismiss the possibility that Paul was here presenting a standard for all women of the congregation. While all Christian women should avoid slander and work at being dignified, sober-minded and faithful in all things, these are not criteria for membership in the congregation.

The second possibility we will consider is that Paul was speaking of deacons' wives. That particular thought does appear somewhat reasonable, occurring as it does in a discussion of standards for appointment as a deacon. The exegete can easily imagine that husbands do speak with their wives, or at least one would hope that husbands communicate with their wives. Because this is the case, it is easy to speculate that deacons would likely be privy to matters that could disadvantage those of whom the information is known. Thus, it seems reasonable to many to suggest that a congregation does not just appoint a deacon—they appoint a deacon team, the wife being likely to learn of private matters concerning other members of the assembly. Thus, many fine expositors have suggested that Paul was giving extra instructions concerning the suitability of an individual for the diaconate based on his wife's character.

Those scholars favouring the view that deacons' wives are in the Apostle's view note the continuation of criteria for the diaconate continues after this verse. In this view, it seems natural that Paul is not breaking his line of reasoning, but merely refining the criteria for appointment as a deacon. Therefore, the contention is that Paul speaks parenthetically when he speaks of "women," indicating that he has deacons' wives in mind. The argument is that men would need their wives to assist them in serving the church, thus strengthening the ministry. Also, in arguing for the meaning of deacons' wives, some scholars have noted that Paul limits the role of women earlier, so they imagine that he is now advancing a ministry for them.

Additionally, those favouring the concept that deacons' wives are in view argue that the absence of any reference to marital status or fidelity indicates wives that are recognised both as married to deacons and known to be faithful to their husbands. This appears to be rationalisation born of desperation to justify the position. The requirement that older widows be recognised as a one-man woman argues against such a position, as does the fact that the fidelity of the wives of elders is not considered; this particular argument is quite unlikely.¹⁹

¹⁹ E.g. **R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2000) 86-7; see, also, George W. Knight, **The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text**, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1992) 170-2; John A. Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 144-5

The arguments favouring the idea that Paul is presenting criteria for deacons' wives merit a studied response. In the first place, a congregation is to seek out deacons, not deacon teams. When the first servants of a church were selected [see **ACTS 6:1-6**], the specific instructions to the congregation was, "Pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" [**ACTS 6:3**]. Neither instruction concerning deacon teams nor consideration of the wives of these men was provided. In fact, we cannot say with certainty that any of these first deacons (for that is the role they filled) were even married. If wives were necessary for fulfilling the role of a deacon, surely it would be addressed elsewhere in the Word.

Additionally, it seems surprising to me that if qualifications for deacons' wives is given in this verse that there are no similar conditions attached to the wives of elders. In fact, other than the requirement that an elder be "the husband of one wife" [**1 TIMOTHY 3:2**] and that "he must manage his own household well, with all dignity" [**1 TIMOTHY 3:4**], there is not much said concerning the family of an elder. Would not an elder speak with his wife about matters of ministry? Is there not a possibility that he may be privy to information that is potentially embarrassing to members of the assembly? If an elder is expected to maintain confidence, should not a deacon also be expected to possess sufficient integrity to be discrete, maintaining confidence on private matters?

If an individual is inclined to argue that the inclusion of this verse in the midst of Paul's presentation of criteria for the diaconate implies that he is speaking of the wives of deacons, it must be allowed that it is just as likely that he is providing criteria for women who serve either as assistants to the diaconate or to women chosen to that position.

Two additional issues argue against accepting that deacons' wives are in view. First, the absence of a definite article and the absence of the pronoun "their" argue against this view. I understand that the word "their" does occur in some translations. In the Authorised Version and some other more recent translations, the word is italicised to indicate that it does not occur in the original language. I would argue that the fact that Paul abruptly introduces the word "Women" indicates that he does not have wives in view. Had he meant to speak of deacons' wives, he would have used a similar construction to that used in **1 TIMOTHY 3:2, 12** or that employed in **EPHESIANS 5:28**, when he wrote, "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."

The other argument against the wives of deacons being in view is Paul's use of the word translated "likewise." This word is used to introduce a new point. For instance, the Apostle had spoken of his desire for men to pray in **VERSE 8**, immediately following with this statement in **VERSE 9**, "likewise also that women." After presenting the qualifications for elders, Paul introduces the qualifications for deacons in this manner, "Deacons likewise ..." [**1 TIMOTHY 3:8**]. Now, he presents a similar concept with this verse, "Their wives likewise..." [**1 TIMOTHY 3:11**]. Thus, it is apparent that this is a literary device for the Apostle to transition from one point to the next. Since he is speaking of deacons, and is obviously not finished with his consideration of the qualifications of a deacon, we would need to understand that he is presenting qualification for another group that will function within the diaconate—women.

Considering the arguments for deacons' wives that have been advanced by contemporary scholars, I must say that the arguments presented favouring the idea that Paul is speaking of the wives of deacons are unpersuasive. I cannot see the necessity of appeal to such a position in order to resolve the issue. I can see that arguments for the appointment of women to the diaconate are a very real possibility. However, it is necessary that we understand the diaconate in the apostolic view. Therein lies a serious deficit in modern church life.

The third possibility—the one I favour—is that Paul is speaking of female deacons. Permit me first to present my reasoning for adopting this view before considering the problems arising among contemporary churches when this particular view is adopted. At the time Paul wrote, there was no word for “deaconess,” no word that could be used to indicate a female filling the role of a servant of the church. In later days, the term *diakónissa* indicating female deacons entered the vernacular and was adopted for use among the churches.²⁰ However, it was not until the fourth century that the term “deaconess” was commonly used,²¹ the first official use of the term appearing to have been in the nineteenth canon of the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Therefore, at the time Paul was writing, the clearest statement he could have provided would have been to speak of “women” while writing of the qualifications for the diaconate.

That women served as servants of the churches cannot be denied.²² Paul introduces Phoebe as a “deacon.” “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well” [ROMANS 16:1, 2]. The word translated “servant,” is the word “*diákonos*”—“deacon.”

Very early in the history of the churches, women were appointed to position as servants among the churches. Among the ancient writings available to students of church history is a letter written by Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan. The letter is dated c. A.D. 112. The purpose of the letter is to seek input on how to discover whether individuals seized are Christian or merely trouble-makers. One paragraph speaks of those who were charged as being Christians “also declar[ing] that the substance of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they customarily gathered before dawn on a fixed day to sing in alternation a hymn to Christ as if to a god, and they bound themselves by an oath, not in a criminal conspiracy, but to refrain from robbery, theft, or adultery, from breaking their word, from reneging on a deposit. After this they usually dispersed, reassembling later on in order to take food of a common and harmless kind. And so I believed that it was all the more necessary to seek the truth from two female slaves, who are called ‘ministers,’ doing so by means of torture. I found nothing except a degenerate, excessive superstition.”²³ The word translated “ministers,” is the Latin term “*ministrae*,” which is often translated in English as “*deaconesses*.”

Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-220) speaks of “women deacons” or “ministering women,” and of “fellow deacons” who travelled with the apostles “not as wives but as sisters.”²⁴ Origen writes, “[1 TIMOTHY 3:11] teaches with the authority of the Apostle that even women are instituted deacons in the Church. This is the function which was exercised in the church of Cenchreae by Phoebe... [T] here are ... women deacons in the Church... Women, who by their good works deserve to be praised by the Apostle, ought to be accepted in the diaconate.”²⁵

²⁰ See William Mitchell Ramsay, **Historical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles** (Hodder and Stoughton, London 1909-1911) 406-7

²¹ Walter A. Elwell, **Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Second Edition** (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI 2001) 321

²² For a review of this point, see, Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Hermeneutical and Exegetical Challenges in Interpreting the Pastoral Epistles,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 7, no. 3, (2003) 3-13

²³ Lawrence J. Johnson, **Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources, vol. 1** (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 2009) 84-5

²⁴ Cited by William D. Mounce, **Pastoral Epistles, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary** (Word Inc., Dallas, TX 2000) 211

²⁵ Cited by Catherine Kroeger, “The Neglected History of Women in the Early Church, *Christian History Magazine*-Issue 17 (Christian History Institute, Worcester, PA 1988)

QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONESSSES — The adverb, “likewise,” reminds the reader that the Apostle has already presented qualifications, and these he is about to present are of an identical nature. As already mentioned, it is also indicative that he is adding to what has already been presented. In other words, just as Paul has used this word to denote transition to another class of persons, there is no reason to believe that he is doing differently in this instance. Clearly, Paul is giving qualifications for women who will serve as deacons in this verse.

The requirements presented are four-fold, mirroring those already laid down for men. Paul is not adding anything; he is seeking to ensure clarity in the qualifications for women who will receive appointment to this position. The first requirement for women who will serve in this capacity is that they be “dignified.” Note that the criterion is identical to the requirement of men who will serve as deacons. In **VERSE EIGHT**, Paul wrote, “Deacons likewise must be dignified.” The word used is variously translated in Bibles currently in use among the churches as, “worthy of respect,” “respected by others,” “serious,” “reverent,” “of high principle,” and “of good character.” Women receiving appointment as deacons must be of such character that they are looked up to by all the members of the church. They are mandated to live in such a manner that outsiders will think highly of them because of their good deeds and righteous behaviour.

Similarly, women appointed to the diaconate must not be slanderers. The concept is mirrored in the requirements for males appointed as deacons. In **1 TIMOTHY 3:8**, Paul writes, “Deacons must be ... not double-tongued.” The idea presented is that women appointed as deacons must not be reputed to be malicious gossips. The word Paul uses in this instance is usually employed of the devil. Slander and gossip is the devil’s work; anyone engaging in this despicable activity is speaking the devil’s language. Women serving as deacons will enter into homes where men have no business entering; they will hear things that they dare not repeat in other situations. Women serving as deacons must be on guard lest they are caught up in the devil’s work. Women functioning as deacons will serve in the home life of the congregation, becoming intimately acquainted with domestic circumstances. Thus, these women must be free of any tendency to talk in one house about the affairs of another; should a deaconess fail in this regard, she opens herself to slander and malicious gossip.

Women appointed to serve within a congregation as deacons must be “sober-minded,” corresponding perhaps to the injunction that male deacons must not be “addicted to much wine” [see **1 TIMOTHY 3:8**]. The idea conveyed by the Apostle’s choice of wording is that she is to be temperate or self-controlled; she must not be stampeded by fear or given to following her impulses. Women serving as deacons must be known to be moderate in their speech as well as in their actions. Excess, except perhaps for excess in love for the Master and for His people, must not characterise those serving as deacons.

The fourth criterion provided for a woman who serves as a deacon is that she must be “faithful in all things.” This requirement Paul gives is similar to that for men appointed to the diaconate; they “must hold the mystery of the Faith with a clear conscience” [**1 TIMOTHY 3:9**]. Though deacons do not oversee the elders, nor provide spiritual oversight, their position must reflect Christian maturity.

I will suggest that women who receive appointment to serve as deacons will have also met the criterion that they will be tested, just as men appointed to the diaconate must be tested [see **1 TIMOTHY 3:10**]. Paul’s use of “likewise” would lead to this conclusion, and also lead to the view that the women appointed to this position must be proved blameless, just as men appointed as deacons must be proved blameless.

CUTTING THE GORDIAN KNOT — Admittedly, the message must appear more as an academic exercise to some than it does a sermon. However, the matter is sufficiently important to the health of the congregation that careful examination of this issue is mandated. I am convinced that women can, and should, be appointed as deaconesses. The problem with this stance is the common understanding of the role of a deacon. For the next several Sundays, the messages will examine among other matters the role of deacons. However, I do want to present an initial assessment of the role of deacons and of deaconesses at this time.

Deacons find no comfort in Scripture to form a board. I have previously stated that deacons are not appointed as ruling executives; neither are deacons to be mere glorified building and property managers nor even the congregational factotums.²⁶ Deacons have a specific position to fill among the people of God. The Word is admittedly somewhat fuzzy on the role of deacons. However, if we grant that the opening verses of **ACTS 6** provide a review of the first deacons, it is apparent that these men were appointed to administer benevolence on behalf of the congregation. Underscore in your minds that the sole example of deacons serving among the apostolic churches demonstrates an emphasis on benevolence to the least among God's people.

This is in keeping with the emphasis found throughout the Word of God. Let me point to just a few verses of Scripture. Remember James' instruction at the conclusion of the first chapter. "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" [**JAMES 1:26, 27**].

Rebuking Israel for ignoring the mind of God, Isaiah warns,

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause."

[**ISAIAH 1:16, 17**]

Condemning the princes, Isaiah also wrote:

"Your princes are rebels
and companions of thieves.
Everyone loves a bribe
and runs after gifts.
They do not bring justice to the fatherless,
and the widow's cause does not come to them."

[**ISAIAH 1:23**]

²⁶ See Michael Stark, "Ministers of Mercy," sermon, 1 September 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%203.08-13%20ministers%20of%20mercy.pdf>

The Psalmist, speaking for God, instructs those who would read his words,

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.””

[PSALM 82:3, 4]

In another of the Psalms, David writes:

“Blessed is the one who considers the poor!
In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;
the LORD protects him and keeps him alive;
he is called blessed in the land;
you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.”

[PSALM 41:1, 2]

God is concerned for the widows and orphans, if the Psalmist wrote by His will.

“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.
God settles the solitary in a home;
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.”

[PSALM 68:5, 6]

Permit me to point out one final statement from the Psalms, driving this point home.

“The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.”

[PSALM 146:9]

In these verses, we witness the will of God both for His ancient people and for His new creation. This accounts for the admonition Moses delivered to Israel. “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” [DEUTERONOMY 10:12-19].

Since the desire of God was that His people were to care for the weak and for the vulnerable among them, it should come as no surprise that He expects the same response from His churches. Moreover, God has appointed a group that will fulfil precisely such responsibilities—deacons. There are many instances where a man has no business entering a home because of the possibility of misunderstanding of his intent; in such instances, the churches have from earliest days appointed deaconesses to provide ministries of mercy.

From historical writings, we know that deaconesses assisted at women's baptisms and performed charitable work. Generally, among the ancient churches, deaconesses had to be at least sixty years of age²⁷ and either unmarried or widowed.²⁸ The supposition is that the widows mentioned in **1 TIMOTHY 5:9, 10** were chosen as deaconesses. Assuredly, the Gentile churches used these verses as justification for appointment of female deacons.²⁹ One scholar details the work of deaconesses as “the care of the female poor, sick, and imprisoned, assisting in the baptism of adult women, and, in the country churches of the East, perhaps also of the West, the preparation of women for baptism by private instruction.”³⁰

What is important for us to note is that the deaconesses functioned as deacons, providing ministry to the needy among the membership of the congregation and even in the community. If deaconesses were to fulfil this service among the churches in this day, I am quite confident that God would be glorified and the Faith of Christ the Lord would be advanced throughout the world. However, so long as the churches of this present day view the diaconate as a ruling board of some sort, conflict and dissention will continue among the people of God. I suggest it is time that we review church governance, endeavouring again to do what is presented in the Word.

I recommend to this congregation that we ensure that the deacons we appoint fully understand that they are ministers of mercy. I know that God has been working in the lives of some of our people, perhaps more actively than I can ever imagine. I am confident that in short order He will raise up men and women who will serve the assembly in this neglected capacity. May He encourage us to the praise of His glory through providing all that are required for the health of the assembly. Amen.

²⁷ The general council of Chalcedon, in 451, reduced the canonical age to forty years. Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, **History of the Christian Church, vol. 3** (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, NY 1910) 260

²⁸ Gerard H. Ettlinger, “The Christian History Timeline—John Chrysostom,” *Christian History Magazine*-Issue 44: John Chrysostom: Legendary Early Church Preacher, Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 1994)

²⁹ Augustus Neander, *History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles*, trans. J. E. Ryland (James M. Campbell & Co.; Saxton & Miles, New York, NY 1844) 97

³⁰ Schaff and Schaff, *op. cit.*, 259-60