

# Women Deacons Position Statement

## Introduction

Gospel City Church upholds complementarian governance: male elders (oversight, teaching), with the possibility that qualified men and women can serve as a deacon (service-focused). We recognize that faithful, like-minded churches committed to Scripture may come to different convictions on the question of women serving as deacons. Gospel City allows for women deacons, as they are not authoritative in our church polity.

## Biblical Foundations

### 1 Timothy 3:1-13 (“Wives” or “Women”)

1 Timothy 3:11 begins, “Women must likewise be dignified.” The word “likewise” relates these women to an office of the church. It refers back to verse 1 and indicates that Paul was talking about the category of an office. It was unlikely that Paul was talking about the wives of deacons because no pronoun was used to refer to them. If that’s what he meant, it seems he would have said *their* wives, or *their* women, but the Greek lacks the word “their,” and its insertion in the ESV reflects an interpretation decision by translators. The word used here is *gynaikas*, which could be translated as either “wives” or “women.” The bare use of the word without the accompanying “*their*” supports the view that “women” is the better translation.<sup>1</sup> Some object that women serving as deacons can’t be in view, since Paul refers to male deacons in 3:8–10 and then returns to that theme in 3:12–13. The thinking is that a one-verse insertion about women in 3:11 can’t, therefore, refer to female deacons. However, the issue remains because in either view, Paul is interrupting the discussion to focus on either “women” or “wives”, before returning to men.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the word “likewise” (*hosautōs*) in 1 Timothy 3:11 is most naturally interpreted as continuing the list of those who serve as deacons, especially since Paul returns to male deacons in verse 12. A sudden reference to wives is possible, but in this chapter, it seems Paul is referring to offices and conduct in the church.

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<sup>1</sup>Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 1 Tim. 3:11, footnote a (“Or Wives likewise, or Women likewise.”).

<sup>2</sup>[Does the Bible Support Female Deacons? Yes. 2019 | Thomas Schreiner](#)

## GOSPEL CITY CHURCH

### Lack of Qualifications for Elder's Wives

If the reference is to the wives of deacons, it creates the question, “Why does Paul omit a reference to the wives of elders, particularly since elders exercise pastoral oversight and overall leadership in the church?” It would seem the character of the wives of elders would be even more important than the wives of deacons, and thus, focusing on the wives of deacons, but not on the wives of elders, is strange. Yet if the reference is to female deacons, there is an explanation for why the wives of elders aren't mentioned—for the wives of deacons aren't included either. In other words, Paul isn't referring to wives at all, but to female deacons.

### Romans 16:1 (Phoebe as a deacon)

In Romans 16:1, Phoebe was either a “deacon” or “servant” of the church in Cenchreae. The Greek “*diakonos*” may refer to a general servant or the office of a servant. While both translations are plausible, the addition of the words “*the church in Cenchreae*” suggests an official capacity. Verse 2 supports this understanding, since Phoebe is designated as a “patron” (ESV) or “benefactor” (CSB), which means she regularly helped, perhaps financially, those in need.<sup>3</sup>

### Deacons and Elders

There has been a general concern that appointing women as deacons violates 1 Timothy 2:12, where we find that women are prohibited from teaching or exercising authority over men. In some congregationally-led churches, the office of “Deacon” has been used inaccurately to refer to someone who teaches or exercises authority. In these cases, women deacons would be inappropriate, but that issue is subordinate to the issue of improper church governance.

Biblically, deacons occupy a different position from elders/pastors/overseers. We find the qualifications for elders/pastors/overseers differ in two ways from those of deacons. First, we see that elders/pastors/overseers must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). Second, they must have gifts of leadership (1 Tim. 3:4–5; 5:17; Titus 1:7).

Teaching men or exercising authority over men is the very thing disallowed for women in 1 Timothy 2:12. Women may serve as deacons because the diaconal office is one of serving. Deacons do not teach and exercise spiritual oversight or authority, but rather help lead and facilitate the meeting of the physical needs of the church.

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<sup>3</sup> [Does the Bible Support Female Deacons? Yes. February 19, 2019 | Thomas Schreiner](#)