

## Deaconess or Wives of Deacons or Women Serving in the Church?

1 Tim. 3:11 “*Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*”

There has been much discussion over the interpretation of this verse especially in connection with the identity of the “women”. Keeping in mind that they are being distinguished from and compared with what has just gone before – Diakon; in the same way that Deacons are distinguished from and compared with Elders in 1 Tim 3: 8, the same Gk. word for “likewise” being used in 1 Tim. 3:8 & 3:11.

Dr. Richard Mayhue identifies 3 interpretations...

1. The NIV follows the KJV in assuming that these women were **the wives of the deacons**. The main argument against this that the word for “their” is missing in the Greek. Yet Vine feels that this meaning is “probable.” It seems logical to assume them to be “wives” of Deacons because Paul is addressing the male Deacons in 3:8-10 and again in 3:12-13, so verse 11 right in the middle fits as being a word to wives.
2. Some have suggested that he is speaking of **women in general**. But the context of vv. 8-12 would seem to rule this out.
3. White argues strongly that the reference is to **deaconesses**, of whom Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) is an example. He would take these as a separate group of church officials. The view is maintained by Bernard and Lock. We know that there were deaconesses in the church in later centuries; whether there was such an order in the first century is debatable.

George W. Knight lists 4 interpretations...

1. The women are **inherently part** of the “*diakonoi*.”
2. The women are **deaconesses, distinguished from but comparable with** the “*diakonoi*.”
3. The women are **female assistants** to the “*diakonoi*.”
4. The women are the **wives** of the “*diakonoi*.”

William Hendricksen takes a mediating position...

“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 qualification, 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 reviewing the passage into consideration, I believe in the mediated interpretation. That is that these women are either the wives of the designated deacons, or female assistants to the designated and identified male Deacons.

My view is based on the fact that the use of adverb “*hosautos*” which means “likewise, or even like” which is used in 1 Tim. 3:8 brings out the distinctiveness of Deacons from Elders, but also carries the meaning of comparison or likeness, and the usage of “*hosautos*” in 3:11 for these women which declares a distinctness between the Deacon and the women referred to, as well as a comparison or likeness – if a woman serves the church, she must exhibit the character qualifications listed in 3:11 whether she is the wife of a Deacon or a single woman, or a widow. (That is, they must be – *worthy of respect; not malicious talkers; temperate; and faithful [trustworthy] in all things.*) But the use of “*hosautos*” brings with it enough distinctiveness that I cannot hold to an “office” or “order” of deaconess as I do not believe the NT gives us enough direction for women to be in a place of authority in the church, via office or gifting (i.e. teaching, administration, etc.). Another reason for my position is that if we interpret these women to be solely the “wives” of deacons, we have placed an additional qualification on potential deacons that their wives must be involved in ministry. I am uncomfortable placing this additional restriction on deacon candidates. Some may be in a time of life where they have small children and their wives are needed more on the home-front rather than engaged in ministries of the church. But, if a woman, as the wife of a deacon, is engaged in ministry, she must meet these qualifications. I believe women (other than the wives of elders or deacons) may serve the church in various ways, and when they do they need to have a good Christian testimony and meet the spiritual character qualifications of 1 Tim. 3:11. If married, she remains under the authority of her husband, if she is single or a widow she would be under the mantle of authority of her father or the elders of the church to be in harmony with the NT teaching of women’s roles and authority within the church.

In the final analysis, there is no compelling case that can be made from the Greek grammar surrounding this word used for women in 3:11 (*gyne*) because it carries the following meanings in various contexts...

1. Used as a general term for a female – virgin, married or widowed; (Mt. 9:20; 13:33; 28:55; Lk. 13:11; Acts 5:14, etc.)
2. A wife – (1 Cor. 7:3,10,13; Eph. 5:22; Mt. 5:31; 9:35; Acts 5:1,7; 1 Cor. 7:2; Eph. 5:28; Rev. 2:20).
3. A betrothed woman – (Mt. 1:20, 24).
4. Used as descriptive – Indignation Lk. 22:57; Admiration Mt. 25:28; In Kindness Lk. 13:12; Jn. 4:21; In Respect Jn. 2:41; 14:26