

Some thoughts on
Women's role in the church

Women's role in the church today is a very important subject, as every Bible subject is. In our society the "equality of women" is an issue in most businesses and organizations and the church also has been influenced to reconsider this question. Fortunately we, in the church, have an infallible guide to help us in solving this apparent dilemma.

The Great Commission was given only to *the eleven*, Matthew 28:16. But all the new disciples (both men and women) were then taught to observe *everything* that Jesus had commanded the apostles, verse 20, implying that women also were to "go and teach."

Women's role in the ministry of Jesus is well documented in the Gospels. The Apostle Paul also had many women working with him throughout his ministry.

Luke records that a husband *and* wife taught Apollos, Acts 18:24-27.

Can we therefore conclude that inspiration made no distinction between the Christian Work of male and female members of the church? Before we decide we must take note of several other facts established in the scriptures.

- 1) Jesus chose only men to be apostles.
- 2) The husband is the head of the wife in *everything*, Ephesians 5:22:24.
- 3) Only men can be elders, 1 Timothy 3:2
- 4) Only men can be deacons, 1 Timothy 3:12 (Romans 16:1 is discussed in detail in the appendix.)
- 5) Only men were selected for feeding the widows in Acts 6:3.

It seems obvious that some distinction is made by the Holy Spirit between the Christian work of the male and female members of the church. The important thing to remember is that *only* the Holy Spirit, through his word, can make that distinction! Since He has already made some differences in the work of men and women, examples 1 through 5 above, is there any other distinctions we must consider? Yes there is. At least one more scripture must be considered.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Sometimes it beneficial to state the obvious. These verses were written by the Holy Spirit. They are therefore true and understandable, 2 Corinthians 1:13. We must also note one more characteristic of the writings of the Holy Spirit: Every word chosen by the Holy Spirit is the very best choice to convey His idea to all people in every generation! Yes, 1 Corinthians was written to the church at Corinth, but its meaning was intended for all people for all time. This idea is verified by 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:3. We do not need to know the societal peculiarities of this city in order to understand this message. If this last sentence is not true we have two unacceptable implications: 1) Most people in most countries and generations can't understand this passage because they don't have this particular historical knowledge, and 2) No one will every be confident of the meaning of this passage because, to this day, the societal peculiarities of Corinth are still being debated. It may be difficult for some to accept the teachings of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 but it is not difficult to understand them.

If we pray for wisdom, as we must, James 1:5-8. If we love the truth, as we must, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 (especially verse 11) -- we will, ... repeat WILL, understand these verses and when we, and our church, practice this teaching we will be happier and more pleasing to God.

Some thoughts on
Women's role in the church

Appendix

Romans 16:1, was Phoebe a deaconess?

The answer to this question is based solely on the translation of the Greek word *διακονον*, therefore we must pursue the details of the Greek meaning. This particular Greek word is used only one other place in the New Testament, i.e. Romans 15:8 The first place to look for our answer is the various translation. A few examples follow:

	Romans 15:8	Romans 16:1
John Wycliffe (1382)	"a minister"	"in the service of the church"
John Purvey (1395)	"a minister"	"in the service of the church"
William Tyndale (1526 & 1534)	"a minister"	"a minister of the congregation"
Geneva Bible (1599)	"a minister"	"a servant"
KJV,	"a minister"	"a servant"
NKJV,	"a servant"	"a servant"
ASV,	"a minister"	"a servant"
NASB,	"a servant"	"a servant"
NIV,	"a servant"	"a servant"
ESV,	"a servant"	"a servant"
YLT (Young's Literal Translation)	"a ministrant"	"a ministrant"

Next we must check the interlinears:

Berry's Interlinear (1897) --	"a servant,"	"a servant,"
Marshall's Interlinear (1958) --	"a minister"	"a minister"
Brown & Comfort (1990) --	"a servant"	"a deacon"
William Mounce (2008) --	"a servant"	"a servant"

Please note that from the first English translation by John Wycliffe in 1382 until sometime after the ASV of 1901 this Greek word was never translated by the English *deaconess*. The ESV, NASB, NIV, and ASV give the possibility of "deaconess" in the footnote. Many of the more modern translations use *deaconess* in the text of Romans 16:1, but I could find no translation which gave *deaconess* in the text or even as a footnote in Romans 15:8. This just proves the obvious: only the context can choose the correct word from a list of valid options.

Checking the two most prominent Lexicons for the meaning of *διακονος*; the root word from which *διακονον* is derived:

BDAG: generally, one who is busy with something in a manner that is of assistance to someone.

1. one who serves as an intermediary in transaction, i.e. *agent, intermediary, courier*.
2. one who gets something done, at the behest of a superior, i.e. *assistant* to someone. ...
... (the English derivatives 'deacon' and 'deaconess' are technical terms, whose meanings varies in ecclesiastical history and are therefore inadequate for rendering NT usage of *διακονος*)

Thayer: one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, i.e. a servant, attendant, minister.

1. universally: of the servant of a king, Matt. 22:13. If "the church" is in the context: of

Some thoughts on
Women's role in the church

- one who promotes what promotes the welfare prosperity of the church, Col. 1:25
2. a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use.
 3. a waiter, one who serves food and drink, John 2:5, 9.

From all the above evidence it is clear that many English words could possible be used to translate our Greek word, διακονον. This word is from the root word διακονος. Some form of this root word is used 29 times in the New Testament. Of these 29 uses only Philippians 1:1, and four times in the passage from 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is the English word *deacon* used in the KJV, NKJV, ASV, NIV. This simply illustrates the more common translation is to use some word other than *deacon*.

The most important thing to remember is only the context can determine the correct English word to use to translate any Greek word!! The Context is:

Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchreae: 2 that ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself also hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self.

High praise indeed from Paul and the Holy Spirit. But the degree of praise and/or her importance to the work is not the question (compare this to verses 3-5a, regarding Prisca and Aquila).

Her value to Paul and his work in beyond question. Her sincerity, Christian spirit, generous Labor and great example are not doubted but should be admired, remembered and followed. The only question is "was she a deaconess?" Given all the above evidence supporting an alternative translation, such as *servant, minister, helper*, etc. we can conclude that Phoebe was not a deaconess for four reasons: 1) there is no evidence necessitating this translation, 2) if *deaconess* is the correct translation then all the English speaking people for almost 600 years (John Wycliffe in 1382 until after the ASV of 1901) could not have know the truth that women could be deacons. -- Would God have allowed that ignorance to prevail for almost 600 years? and 3) There is no such thing as a deaconess. If a deaconess is defined as a female deacon then that is a contradiction in terms, i.e. a deacon must be a husband, there can be no such thing as a female husband, therefore there is no such thing as a deaconess. 4) We have no information to identify which active females Christians should/can have this office, if indeed it does exist. Would God allow an office in the church for female Christian then give us no way to decide who or how to attain this office??

With all this evidence it seems reasonable to conclude that Phoebe was not a deaconess.