

The Flabbergasting Reason Women Should Be Deacons and Ministers

Yes, this headline is a parody of Internet clickbait articles. Nevertheless, the Word of God is unmistakably clear that not only can women become deacons and ministers, but that they should do so!

The English word “deacon” descends from the Greek *diakonos* (Strong’s #1249), which means, “one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master; a servant, attendant, minister...” In other words, a “deacon” or “minister” is not a position of authority, but a servant!

Throughout the New Testament, *diakonos* is most commonly translated as “minister,” but also often as “servant.” The differences in translation are irrelevant, though, for a minister, a deacon, and a servant are all one and the same thing!

Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah, used *diakonos* several times to teach that if anyone desired to be great, he should become a deacon or minister, that is, a servant. For example, we read in Mark 9:35, “And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant [*diakonos*; deacon or minister] of all.’”

In Rom. 13:4, Paul described the earthly authorities as “God’s minister,” that is, *diakonos*, meaning servant or deacon. The phrase would be more precisely translated as “God’s servant.” Any worldly ruler used by God is, in a sense, God’s servant, as were King Cyrus (Isa. 44:28; 45:1) and King Nebuchadnezzar.

God has His true servants as well, those who fear and obey Him, as we see throughout the Word of God. Satan, too, has his servants: 2 Cor. 11:15 speaks of the ministers (*diakonos*) of Satan, that is, Satan’s deacons or servants.

Yeshua, Jesus, is Himself called a *diakonos* in Rom. 15:8 and Gal. 2:17. This is a most fitting description of the One Who “did not come to be served [*diakoneo*, Strong’s #1247], but to serve [*diakoneo*], and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mat. 20:28). Our Savior, though Lord of all, came as a deacon and a minister, that is, a servant.

Circling back to the title of this post, God's Word describes a woman named Phoebe as a deacon! In Rom. 16:1, Paul labels her a servant (*diakonos*) of the congregation in Cenchrea. Therefore, it would be just as correct to describe her as a deacon or minister!

How is it possible for a woman to be a deacon in the congregation, when God's Word is very clear that a woman cannot hold a position of authority within the congregations (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34)? Hang onto this question for a moment, for there are a few additional questions to ask before we find the answer to all of them at once.

Paul describes himself and Apollos as "ministers," that is, deacons or servants, in 1 Cor. 3:5. About half a dozen times in the New Testament, Paul describes himself thus as a deacon, minister, or servant.

Yet we also know that Paul was an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; etc.). How could he be both a deacon and an apostle?

Hold onto that question, too, for a moment, and consider also the fact that the original seven "deacons" in Acts 6:1-6 are never, anywhere in Scripture, specifically called deacons! Stephen is never called a deacon, Philip is never called a deacon, and none of the other five are ever called deacons, either. Philip is described only as an "evangelist" (Strong's #2099) in Acts 21:8, that is, a "proclaimer of good news."

Those seven men have become known as deacons by tradition because Acts 6:1 specified that they were chosen for a ministry or service (Strong's #1248; *diakonia*) that the twelve apostles were unable to attend to. We might think of them as the apostles' deputies, just as a sheriff in the Wild West would have deputies to help him perform his duties.

However, though they are never specifically called deacons, it is correct to think of them as such, for they were chosen to perform a ministry (*diakonia*). Furthermore, remember that the definition of a *diakonos* or deacon is "one who executes the commands of another," that is, one who is given a mission or a task to perform.

Yet, remember that Philip was both a deacon and an evangelist; that Paul was both a deacon and an apostle; that Phoebe, a woman, was a deacon; that a deacon, a minister, and a servant are merely different translations of the same word *diakonos*; and that both God and Satan have deacons, servants, or ministers. How can we explain these things?

The answer, as we will see momentarily, is glaringly obvious: a deacon is simply one who serves another, or who performs an assigned task. In fact, in God's Word, there is no position or office of deacon within the congregations, just as there is no position or office of servant!

"Whoa! Hold up," you might say, "why did Paul give Timothy qualifications for deacons in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 if there is no such office?" Let's turn there and find out!

First of all, some Bible versions, such as the KJV and NKJV, have somewhat altered the meaning of this passage by adding words and interpretations that do not belong there. Here's 1 Tim. 3:8-13 in *Young's Literal Translation*:

"Ministrants -- in like manner grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not given to filthy lucre, having the secret of the faith in a pure conscience, and let these also first be proved, then let them minister, being unblameable. Women -- in like manner grave, not false accusers, vigilant, faithful in all things. Ministrants -- let them be of one wife husbands; the children leading well, and their own houses, for those who did minister well a good step to themselves do acquire, and much boldness in faith that is in Christ Jesus."

In other words, those who serve the congregations or who are given a mission to perform ought to have high moral character, to perform those tasks well, and to represent God's people honorably. This can apply not only to apostles, evangelists, or teachers, but to anyone within the congregation, even women, as Young's translation of v. 11 shows!

It must be noted that the Greek word translated "women," *gyne* (Strong's #1135), can also mean "wives," which is how the KJV and NKJV have translated it. Those versions have further added the interpretation that these are the wives of the deacons, but there is nothing in this passage to indicate either that these are wives or that they are the deacons' wives.

Instead, as the literal translation shows, Paul was simply showing that women who serve the congregation or are given a mission to perform, that is, are *diakonos*, ought also to have high moral character, to perform those tasks well, and to represent God's people honorably, just as the men should. Indeed, Phoebe in Rom. 16:1 must have been just such a woman!

The fact that women may also be *diakonos*, while also being forbidden from holding any office of authority within the congregations, shows that there is no such office as deacon, just as there is no such office as servant! Nor is there any evidence, anywhere

in God's Word, that "deacon" or "minister" was ever an office, any more than "servant" was ever an office.

A couple of chapters later, in 1 Tim. 5:9-10, Paul gives these instructions on caring for widows: "Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man [compare 1 Tim. 3:12], well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." In other words, a widow who has been a servant, a minister, a deacon!

So we can see that "deacon" and "minister" are not offices or positions in God's congregation, but rather they are anyone who serves God and his or her fellow brethren. Every servant of God is by definition a deacon and a minister. Every man and every woman who seeks to follow Christ must become a deacon, a minister, a servant — just as our Savior Himself was!

Written by Brett Gray (2022)