

SHOULD WE HAVE DEACONESSES IN THE CHURCH?

Brother Waddey: I grew up in the Church of Christ, but have only recently begun to really study the bible. I do have a question about the role of women in the church that has me confused. I'm aware of the references in Corinthians and Timothy as to why women should not hold leaderships roles in the church, however, what about Phoebe who was suppose to be a deaconess? I hope you can help me with my question. David

Dear Bro. David: It is a fact that some Bible translations refer to Phoebe as a deaconess. (See the Jerusalem Bible and the Revised Standard Version. The American Standard Version places that rendering in a footnote). On the other hand most standard versions render the term diaconon by "servant." The word is used throughout the New Testament and is variously rendered "servant" and "deacon". When we read that the leadership of the church consists of bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1) it is using the term to describe those who are official servants of the church. The qualifications for official deacons are found in I Tim. 3:8-10;12-13). From Acts 6:1-6 we can conclude that deacons were to assist the elders in the work of the church. Some read the words about women in I Tim. 3:11 and conclude that they refer to the office of deaconess, but a little thought shows that they refer to the wives of those who serve rather than a distinct office of female servants.

Given all the above, we must not conclude that women have not role to fill in the life and work of the church. They are a vital part of the body and can "serve" in many important ways just as the rest of us who are not official deacons. The leadership of the church however God has placed in the hands of godly men (I Tim. 2:11-12). Those ladies who love the Lord and honor his word will recognize and accept that provision.

We are hearing some people promoting the idea of women deacons as part of a bigger package of changes they wish to impose on the Lord's church. While they cite Phoebe and the possibility that she was an official deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, what they really want is women who can lead in public worship, teach men and even preach in the assembly. We must reject such presumptions.

JHW