

A Historical and Biblical Examination of Women Deacons

Chapter 2: The Biblical Evidence

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Acts 6:1-6

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them (NKJV).

Acts 6:1-6 is an important passage in the debate over whether or not Scripture authorizes the ordination of women to the diaconate. Given the fact that orthodox Presbyterians have always at least formally considered the regulative principle to be strictly binding on both worship ordinances and church government, Acts 6:3 is a major obstacle for women-deacon advocates. Why? Because the Bible teaches that "whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden." When the apostles commanded the church to choose seven men (*andres*), women were automatically excluded from the ordained diaconal office. If one wants to remain faithful to the regulative principle and have ordained women deacons, one must prove either that Acts 6:1-6 has nothing to do with the diaconal office or that subsequent revelation teaches, either explicitly or by inference, that women were ordained to the office of deacon. (Other methods of dealing with Acts 6:3 which I consider to be unscriptural are dealt with under the section entitled Circumventing the Regulative Principle.) After considering whether Acts 6:1-6 refers to deacons or temporary officers (e.g., proto-deacons) we will consider whether or not there is enough scriptural evidence to indicate that the apostolic church permitted women to serve in the same office as men deacons at a later point in time.

The views held by the authors of both the OPC Minority and Majority Report on Women in Church Office, that the seven men selected in Acts 6 were not deacons but temporary officers (i.e., the precursors of deacons or proto-deacons), has no basis whatsoever from the Scriptures and is merely a theory of modern scholarship. Aside from a few rare exceptions (e.g., Chrysostom, Homily XIV on Acts), the church throughout its entire history has interpreted Acts 6:1-6 as the institution of the diaconal office. Modernistic scholars argue that it is anachronistic to consider these seven as deacons, given the early state of church affairs at that time, but their

argument is rooted in their anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions. Though the apostles may not have been fully aware of all the details and requirements of the diaconal office at this early date, surely God was aware and inscripturated the institution of this office.

The idea that the seven were proto-deacons may be popular with twentieth century seminary professors but it was not accepted by the great theologians and commentators of the past. Calvin says, "Luke declareth here upon what occasion and to what end and also with what rite deacons were first made."¹ Matthew Henry says, "the deacons are blessed by the apostles, and the overseers of the poor by the pastors of the congregation...and this was giving them authority to execute that office, and laying an obligation upon the people to be observant of them therein."² J. A. Alexander says, "In the case before us, it has even been disputed whether the act was that of ordination to a permanent office in the church, or only that of designation to a temporary service, like that of Barnabas and Saul in 13, 3 below. But although the title *deacon* is not used in this passage, nor indeed in this whole book, yet the judgment of the church has in all ages recognized this as the institution of that office...."³ The patristic scholar Arthur McGiffert says, "The view that the Seven were deacons appears first in Irenaeus (Adv. Haer. I.26.3; III.12.10; IV.15.1), then in Cyprian (Ep. 64.3), and was the commonly accepted opinion of the Roman Church in the third century (for, while they had forty-six presbyters they had seven deacons)...and has been ever since almost universally accepted. In favor of the identification are urged this early and unanimous tradition, the similarity of the duties assigned to the Seven and to later deacons, and the use of the word *diakonia* and *diakonein* in connection with the "Seven" in Acts vi."⁴ The great Puritan theologian John Owen says of Acts 6:1-6:

"It was *the institution of a new office*, and not a present supply in a work or business, which they designed." And again; "Nor was this a temporary institution for that season, and so the officers appointed extraordinary; *but was to abide in the church throughout all generations*." He speaks of the deacon, in the same connexion, as a known and existing officer, remarking, that "the original institution, nature, and use of the office of *deacons* in the church *were so well known*" that it "was not necessary to insist much on them."⁵

Presbyterian scholar James M. Willson, who wrote the best work on the office of deacon in the nineteenth century, says, "Deacons were ordained in the apostolic churches soon after the day of Pentecost. Of the election and ordination of seven deacons in the church at Jerusalem, we have the history of Acts vi.1-6."⁶ (This same interpretation can be found in the commentaries of John Gill, Frank E. Allen, R. C. Lenski, Simon J. Kistemaker, and many others.) There is the possibility that all Reformed scholars prior to the twentieth century were wrong in their interpretation of Acts 6:1-6, but that is unlikely.

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 229.

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, 6:71.

³ J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Banner of Truth Trust, [1857] 1991), p. 247.

⁴ Arthur Castman McGiffert, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1:103, fn.

⁵ John Owen, "Treatise on Church Government," quoted in James M. Willson, *The Deacon*, p. 18.

⁶ James M. Willson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

The common objection to the traditional interpretation of Acts 6:1-6, is that two of the seven (Stephen and Philip) engaged in activities beyond the parameter of the diaconal office. This objection was never considered a problem by older commentators. They usually argue that the responsibilities given to the Seven as "the Seven" are fully in accord with those of the diaconal office. The fact that Stephen and Philip preached the gospel, and that Philip administered the sacrament of baptism are not considered a problem, for they engaged in those activities not as deacons but as evangelists.

If interpreters and theologians from every branch of the church have been wrong in their interpretation of Acts 6:1-6 for almost two thousand years, and the modern interpretation is correct, then this passage of Scripture has little to say regarding the debate. One could argue that since the proto-deacons were male then deacons should also probably be male. But since proto-deacons are not deacons, such an argument is very weak, if not useless. But if Acts 6:1-6 does refer to the institution of the diaconate, then women-deacon advocates must find strong evidence to counter such an explicit passage. There is no reason within the immediate or broader context of Scripture *not* to consider the seven as the first deacons—unless one assumes, as modernists do, that the apostles were just improvising as they went along. Furthermore, the offices that were temporary, such as evangelist and prophet, ceased with the close of the canon and the death of the apostles. Anyone well versed in reformed theology understands why these functions ceased. Why would the apostles replace the ordained office of "proto-deacon" with the identical yet permanent office of deacon? There is no theological or practical reason given anywhere in the New Testament for such a change. If the appointment of "proto-deacons" by the church was an ad-hoc arrangement, why were they ordained? Why would the Holy Spirit give a detailed account of why and how these men were chosen and ordained if this office was just an ad-hoc temporary arrangement? The idea that the seven men chosen and ordained in Acts 6 were "proto-deacons" is pure speculation and should be rejected.

Those who favor the ordination of women as deacons argue that even if Acts 6:3 does refer to the permanent office of deacon, the fact that only men were chosen should not be considered significant or binding on the church. The OPC Minority Report says,

We need not doubt that the Apostles called for the selection of seven men. Logically, however, the appointment of men in the instance does not in itself constitute a prohibition against the appointment of women in later diaconal elections. (Lenski can even speak of the addition of women in such service as the "next logical step"!) What indicates that the intention of the Apostles was—or that the intention of the Spirit who inspired the record is—to set down here a regulation which is to govern the church with regard to the holders of the diaconal office in all generations?⁷

What the authors of the OPC Minority Report ignore in their comments regarding Acts 6:1-6 is that when the passage says that seven men are to be chosen, women are automatically excluded

⁷ OPC Minority Report, p. 952.

from the diaconal office unless they are admitted to that office by subsequent revelation. The regulative principle teaches that whatever is *not* commanded is forbidden. "A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded in the Scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements is forbidden."⁸ If one can prove by command or inference from subsequent revelation that women were admitted to the ordained diaconal office, then one could say that Acts 6:3 was not meant to be binding on all generations of the church. But anyone who claims to be Reformed and who claims to adhere to the regulative principle must admit that at least at the point in time that the events in Acts 6 occurred, women were not allowed by God to be deacons.

Does subsequent revelation teach us that at some time before revelation ceased and the apostles were all dead, God introduced women into the diaconal office described in Acts 6:1-6? The biblical material regarding the diaconal office does not support the idea that women were admitted to the diaconal office at a later date. The biblical evidence indicates that Acts 6:3 was meant by God to be binding on the church for "all generations."

The institution of the diaconal office occurred almost at the very beginning of God's new covenant church. The events in Acts chapter 6 probably occurred in the spring of A.D. 30, according to the Julian calendar. The New Testament book which gives us the most detailed information regarding the diaconal office is 1 Timothy. The pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Tim. and Tit.) were probably the last letters written by the apostle Paul before his death. Orthodox scholars date 1 Timothy from A.D. 64 to A.D. 67. "According to the *Chronicon* of Eusebius it occurred in A.D. 67 or 68."⁹ The institution of the office of deacon and Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding deacons are separated by a period of 35 to 38 years. This period of time encompasses almost the entire writing of the New Testament. If God had introduced women into the ordained diaconate sometime after the events in Acts 6 were recorded, then we could expect such a change to be reflected in Paul's detailed instructions regarding deacons recorded in 1 Timothy chapter 3. But instead we find the opposite (for a detailed analysis of 1 Tim. 3:11 turn to the section of this book where this passage is considered). 1 Timothy 3:11 cannot refer to women deacons who serve in the same office as male deacons, for the syntax indicates three separate classes of servants: elders, deacons and women who assist the deacons (the order of widows, cf. 1 Tim. 5:9ff.).

In his instruction to Timothy regarding deacons, Paul says, "Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (1 Tim. 3:12). As late as A.D. 67 the ordained office of deacon was still restricted to men. Thus the first generation of the Christian church did not have women deacons who served in the same office as male deacons. This fact is significant, for it was during this first generation that the writing of Scripture was completed and all church ordinances were inscripturated and fixed for all subsequent

⁸ John Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publication Society, [1888] 1983), p. 1.

⁹ Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 364.

generations.¹⁰ Another significant fact is that both Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:12 are very clear, unambiguous passages. They are not what interpreters refer to as "problem passages." There are sections of Scripture that are less clear than others. There are passages that theologians and commentators have been divided over for centuries, but Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:12 are not disputed passages. Therefore when we come to a disputed passage or passages that are less clear, such as Romans 16:1, we should interpret the less clear in light of the clear passage.

The idea that the apostles' specific command to choose seven men is not important or binding has serious problems. Women-deacon advocates must argue that the command was arbitrary, or that God intended to introduce women into the diaconate at a later time (the idea that the apostles were sexist or that they were just following their patriarchal culture is based on non-supernatural presuppositions and is not worth considering). The idea that the apostles' command to choose seven men was arbitrary must be rejected. The government that God set over His church is not a result of pragmatism or guess work but is the result of the teaching of the apostles, who were infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit. The idea that God introduced women into the diaconate at a later time is not supported by Scripture (see the sections on 1 Tim. 3:11 and Rom. 16:1) and simply does not make any sense. Why would the apostles command that only men be chosen when many qualified women were present? If God intended to introduce women into the diaconate at a later date, why insist that only men be chosen at the beginning of the institution? There is not one instance in the entire Bible where women were admitted to a church office that at its institution was reserved for males. Jesus spoke in parables to obscure the truth for reprobates but why would God confuse the church by having her choose seven men when all the time He intended to introduce women into the same office at a later date? The fact that women did *not* serve in the *same* office as men deacons until the nineteenth century indicates that the church took Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:12 literally for eighteen centuries.

Circumventing the Regulative Principle

The Number Seven Argument

One clever attempt to circumvent the regulative principle is to accuse those who argue that Acts 6:3 teaches that deacons must be men of being selective in their use of the regulative principle. They argue that since the *number* of deacons chosen (seven) is not considered normative, why should the *gender* of the deacons chosen be considered normative?

Do we not have in v. 3, it is sometimes noted, the explicit instruction of the Apostles to "select from among you, brothers, seven *men*...", which instruction was carried out in the choosing of seven *males*?

¹⁰ There is strong evidence that the canon of Scripture was closed by A.D. 70—not A.D. 95-96. For a detailed argument that the book of Revelation was written before A.D. 70 see *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

Yes, this is certainly the case. And the word used in v. 3 (*andras*, from *aner*) is not the word which is used generically to indicate "person," "human being" (*anthropos*), but is the word which often accepts gender, man in contrast to woman (though it can also emphasize adulthood in contrast to a boy). We need not doubt that the Apostles called for the selection of seven *men*.

Logically, however, the appointment of men in this instance does not in itself constitute a prohibition against the appointment of women in later diaconal elections. (Lenski can even speak of the addition of women in such service as the "next logical step"!) What indicates that the intention of the Apostles was—or that the intention of the Spirit who inspired the record is—to set down here a regulation which is to govern the church with regard to the holders of the diaconal office in all generations?

It is worth noting that the *number* of those to be selected is just as explicitly given, but few congregations consider this to be normative in every situation. Reasons in the contemporary context for setting the number at seven have been suggested (some note that the local Jewish town councils were known as "the Seven [Best] of the Town," some point to seven as the number of completeness, some suggest that another number (than twelve) was chosen in order to show that the number Twelve (Apostles) was not normative!). But we do not believe that we need to know for certain the reason why that number was commanded in that situation in order to know that it is not binding for every council of deacons. In like manner, we need not establish definitively the reason for the selection of males only in the appointment of the original Seven in order to believe that this is not a normative regulation for every council of deacons.

The situation would be different, of course, were a definite restriction of the diaconal office to men only to be stated, based upon Biblical principle (as is the case with regard to teaching and ruling elders, 1 Timothy 2:12); but this is not stated in Acts 6, and we should be extremely careful not to read more into the intended instruction for us than is actually there.¹¹

This clever attempt to avoid the clear teaching of Acts 6:3 that deacons are to be men is in reality a veiled attack on the regulative principle. Either the authors of the OPC Minority Report do not understand how the regulative principle works or they believe that the qualifications given for church offices in Scripture are optional. A brief consideration of the regulative principle will prove my point.

The Presbyterians of the seventeenth century applied the regulative principle to worship *and* church government. They spoke of the divine right (*jus divinum*) of Presbyterian church government. "And whatsoever matters in Church government can be proved by Scripture to have this stamp of divine warrant and authority set upon them, they may properly be said to be *jure divino*, and by the will and appointment of Jesus Christ, to whom God has delegated all power and authority for government of his Church (Mt. 28:18-20; Is. 9:6; Jn. 5:22; Eph. 1:22)."¹² When discussing the regulative principle, Presbyterian theologians made a very clear distinction between the circumstances of worship and church ordinances. The circumstances or incidentals of worship and church government apply to those things that are "common" to human societies.

¹¹ OPC Minority Report, pp. 952-953.

¹² Ministers of Zion College, London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici, or, The Divine Right of Church-Government*, ed. by Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, [1646] 1995), p. 7, emphasis in original.

Thus what kind of chairs are used, the size of windows, the color of carpeting or whether or not to have carpeting, what color clothes to wear, etc. are all considered circumstances of worship. That is these things are easily determined by "Christian prudence." Even an unbeliever could determine such things apart from special revelation.¹³ For example, unbelievers understand the need for chairs, lighting, a building in cold weather, etc. But worship ordinances can only be learned directly from special revelation. Examples of worship ordinances are: preaching from the Bible (Mt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 9:20; 2 Tim. 4:2), reading the word of God (Mk. 4:16-20; Ac. 13:1), meeting on the Lord's day (Ac. 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10), and hearing the word of God (Lk. 2:46; Ac. 8:31; Rom. 10:17; Jas. 1:22).

This same distinction also applies to the government of Christ's church. The biblical teaching regarding church officers (e.g., pastor, elders, and deacons) and the qualifications given for each particular church office can only be determined by divine revelation. Therefore, church offices and the qualifications for church office are in the category of governmental ordinances. But the number of elders and deacons in each particular church is easily determined without specific instructions from special revelation. That is why the *number* of elders and deacons in each church was never considered a divine ordinance by Puritans and Presbyterians.

It is obvious that the qualifications for a deacon can only be determined by the clear teaching of the word of God. But the number of deacons (or elders) can only be determined according to the present circumstances of each congregation. Therefore the qualification of deacons in Acts 6:1-6 (i.e., "*men* of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" v. 3) is ruled by the explicit commands of Scripture. The number given is not a divine ordinance but is incidental to church order.

While it is true that some of the churches in the post apostolic period¹⁴ took the number to be binding, the Protestant reformers and all Protestant commentators consider the number to be a circumstance of the church in Jerusalem and therefore non-binding. John Gill says, "...perhaps no other solid reason is to be given, but that the number was judged sufficient for the

¹³ The believer and unbeliever do not have epistemological common ground but do have metaphysical common ground. Both the believer and unbeliever are created in the image of God and both must live and function in God's universe, in God's created reality. While the unbeliever may hate God and worship idols and adhere to an absurd worldview, by virtue of who he is, and by virtue of God's created reality, he must live and function to a certain degree in accordance with that reality, or perish. By virtue of the fact that the image of God in the broad sense has not been eradicated by the fall and by virtue of God's common grace, unbelievers have a surface knowledge or a functional knowledge of reality. Thus when the authors of the Westminster Confession teach that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and the governance of the church, *common to both* human actions and societies" (1:6), they simply recognize that people—Christian or otherwise—do not need an explicit or implicit command of God to wear a coat when it is 5 degrees outside. The need for a building, chairs, clothing, etc. can easily be determined by both believer and unbeliever; but worship ordinances, qualifications for office, etc. can only be determined by special revelation.

¹⁴ The Roman church in the third century had forty-six presbyters but only seven deacons. Their mistaken notion that the number given in Acts was binding was easily dealt with by appointing numerous assistants to the deacons (e.g., sub-deacons). Thus we should note that their mistaken notion that the number was binding actually contributed to unscriptural innovations in church government. The Reformers from the Calvinistic wing of the Reformation did not commit the same error until the nineteenth century when numerous innovations were brought in (e.g., trustees, Sunday School superintendents, female missionaries, etc.).

care of the poor in that church, and at that time; nor is it obligatory on other churches to have just so many, neither more nor fewer; for such officers are to be chosen as the church requires."¹⁵ Matthew Henry says, "*Look out seven men*; so many they thought might suffice for the present, more might be added afterwards if there were occasion."¹⁶ J. A. Alexander says, "*Seven* has been variously explained, as a number arbitrarily selected, or for some reason of convenience, now unknown; or because seven nations are supposed to have been represented; or because the church was now divided into seven congregations; or, most probably of all, because of its sacred associations which may all perhaps be traced back to the institution of the Sabbath..."¹⁷ R. C. H. Lenski says, "Just why seven were proposed no one knows. It is, of course, a sacred number, but here practical considerations evidently governed.... The reason for selecting seven seems to have been obvious to the congregation, but what this reason was we cannot say."¹⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker says that "the number seven represents the number of fullness."¹⁹ If we interpret seven in Acts 6:3 in its usual scriptural sense of fullness or completeness then seven could be interpreted to mean that each church should have the number of deacons necessary to faithfully complete their task. This, of course, would depend on church size and the number of poor Christians in the community.

The reason that the number seven in Acts 6:3 has never been considered a binding church ordinance by any post Reformation theologian or commentator is the simple fact that such an assertion is absurd. If every church, regardless of size, was required to have seven deacons, small churches would have far too many, while large churches would not have enough. A church with 12, 14, 17 or 22 members might have more deacons than persons in need; a church in a poverty stricken area with 10,000 or 20,000 members would have far too few. Therefore it is clear that the number of deacons is one of those things best determined or "ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence." But the qualifications given (which clearly include being a man) can only be learned through special revelation. This fact explains why female deacons *in the same office* as male deacons did not come into existence until the nineteenth century. If the authors of the Minority Report are truly concerned about applying the regulative principle consistently to Scripture then perhaps they will encourage others to ordain seven deacons in each church. The truth is that their argument regarding number is a ploy to blunt the clear teaching in Acts 6:3 that deacons are to be men. Apparently they do not believe that the regulative principle applies to Acts 6:3 at all: "whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden." The Holy Spirit tells the church to appoint men and ordain them as deacons, therefore women are forbidden by Scripture to be deacons. Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 do not contradict this clear teaching because they do not speak of deacons but of the order of widows.

¹⁵ John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament* ([1809] 1979), 8:90.

¹⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, 6:71.

¹⁷ J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Banner of Truth), pp. 243-244.

¹⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Augsburg, [1933] 1961), pp. 243-244.

¹⁹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 222.

Galatians 3:28

One of the standard methods used to circumvent the regulative principle by those who desire to ordain women to office is to interpret Galatians 3:28 as applying not just to a Christian's salvation in Christ but also to role relationships within the church. If Galatians 3:28 teaches that all role distinctions have been eliminated by Christ, then one could legitimately argue that distinct prohibitions against women serving as elders or deacons are needed in order to justify reserving church offices (e.g., pastor, elder, deacon) for men alone. Thus in this one area of women and church office the regulative principle is suspended. Instead of "whatever is not commanded is forbidden," one could argue that "whatever is not forbidden is permitted." This use of Galatians 3:28 to suspend the regulative principle explains why most Presbyterians who argue for women deacons sound suspiciously like Episcopalians and Lutherans. This tactic is necessary because the Bible explicitly teaches that only men are to be ordained as deacons (cf. Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:12), and the two passages given as positive warrant (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:11) are better interpreted as *not* referring to women deacons in the same office as men deacons. Before we examine why Galatians 3:28 cannot refer to roles within the church (or family), we first should look at how Galatians 3:28 has been used by the advocates of women deacons (in the same office as men deacons) to place the burden of proof on those who teach that women should not be admitted to the male diaconate.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (Covenanter) opened the office of deacon to women in 1888. This small Psalm-singing denomination was considered by many to be one of the strictest Presbyterian bodies when it came to upholding the regulative principle. Yet the advocates of women deacons within this denomination sound more like Prelatists than Presbyterians when discussing women deacons:

The Church of the New Testament is a corporate institution, and all her members have all corporate rights and privileges *unless when explicitly excepted*. How far, however, the enjoyment of these rights and privileges has been limited or otherwise, by such exemptions, can seldom be learned from anything said of the ordinance at its first institution [e.g., Ac. 6:1-6], but is to be gathered from subsequent facts...the privilege of holding and exercising the deacon's office, not being in the case of women one of the things excepted, their right thereto is as plain....²⁰

In all this organizing, Christ Jesus is the Head, the Head of the body, the church, and "in Him there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, we are all one in Christ Jesus." It took long years and much counsel to realize the first declaration [i.e., that slavery is abolished].... The second declaration is realized as a fact today, but hardly as a doctrine.... I regard it as a point settled, that experienced Christian women at a time of life, and in circumstances, when they were free to do so, did service in official place in the early church.

²⁰ *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVI:11 (Nov. 1888), pp. 383-384, emphasis added.

*There was no reason why they should not.... Whatever you deny to another that you claim for yourself, you must deny on a sure warrant. Your warrant to prohibit must be clear.*²¹

To anyone familiar with the regulative principle it is obvious that the above writers have clearly abandoned it with regard to the women-deacon issue. The main reason that the regulative principle has been abandoned in this area is the need to explain away the very clear teaching in Acts 6:3 that deacons must be men. Acts 6:3 must be diffused because Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 are very weak support for their position (as we shall see later). The orthodox Protestant rule of interpretation must be subverted in order to have women deacons: "The infallible rule of the interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one) *it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.*"²² Acts 6:3 is clear, while Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 are not. The above writers know this and thus have used Galatians 3:28 to eliminate its importance.

Using Galatians 3:28 as a platform for complete role equality within the church unless "denied on a sure warrant" is still used to circumvent the regulative principle. The OPC Minority Report says, "Given the Bible's clear teaching regarding the full equality of the sexes before God, we would seem to require some Biblical basis for excluding them from a particular role and office in the church at least as much as we would require a Biblical basis for opening it to them.... *Surely if the N.T. explicitly excludes women from the diaconate, they must be excluded.* Whether any N.T. text does this is the question to be examined."²³ The authors of the OPC Minority Report have wisely not defined what they mean by "full equality of the sexes before God." Apparently they believe that any role differences within the church between men and women have been eliminated by Christ. Such an assertion, while popular in our day, is unbiblical and absurd.

The idea that role differences between men and women in the church are eliminated by Christ cannot be supported by Gal. 3:28 and would involve the New Testament in a whole series of glaring contradictions. Such contradictions are impossible. The standard orthodox interpretation of Galatians 3:28 (which was held by the Reformers and was universally accepted until the church was influenced by feminism in the nineteenth century) is that it speaks "of the oneness of male and female as beneficiaries of God's grace in Christ."²⁴

Martin Luther says,

There is neither Jew nor Grecian.... There is neither male nor female.... Indeed the male, the female, the bond, the free, the Jew, the Gentile, the prince, the subject, are the good creatures of

²¹ Ibid., p. 394ff.

²² Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:9, emphasis added.

²³ OPC Minority Report, p. 942.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 907.

God; but in Christ, that is, *in the matter of salvation* they are nothing.... Him alone doth the Gospel set forth unto us for a pacifier of God's wrath by the shedding of His own blood, and a Savior: without faith in Him, neither shall the Jew be saved by the law, nor the monk by his order, not the Grecian by his wisdom....²⁵

John Calvin says,

The meaning is, that there is no distinction of persons here, and therefore it is of no consequence to what nation or condition any one may belong.... The apostle's object is to show that the grace of adoption, and the hope of salvation, do not depend on the law [or status], but are contained in Christ alone, who therefore is all.²⁶

John Gill says,

But the meaning is, that there is no difference between them [Jew and Gentile], the middle wall of partition being broken down, and that *in the business of justification and salvation*...there is no distinction made between male and female as to divine things; as they are alike called by the grace of God, they have the same right to God's ordinances [i.e., the sacraments].²⁷

Matthew Henry says,

"But all who sincerely believe on Christ, of what nation, or sex, or condition, soever they be, are accepted of Him, and become children of God through faith in Him."²⁸

James M. Porteous says,

"That passage also, 'There is neither male nor female' (Gal. 3:28), is entirely irrelevant [to the subject of women teaching in the church]. *The object of the apostle is to show that there is but one way of salvation for everyone alike.*"²⁹

Ernest DeWitt Burton says,

That he is speaking of these distinctions *from the point of view of religion* [i.e., salvation] is evident from the context in general, but especially from his ineradicable distinction of sex. The passage has nothing to do directly with the merging of nationalities or the abolition of slavery....

²⁵ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Cambridge: James Clarke, [1575] 1978), pp. 342-343, emphasis added.

²⁶ Calvin, *Galatians*, p. 112.

²⁷ John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 9:25, emphasis added.

²⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary*, 6:663.

²⁹ James M. Porteous, *The Government of the Kingdom of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1873), p. 168, emphasis added.

In the former case the meaning is: once in Christ Jesus, whether you be Jew or Gentile, slave or master, man or woman, all these distinctions vanish (there is no respect of persons with God); it is as if it were always the same person [Jesus Christ] reappearing before Him.³⁰

Lange's commentary says,

"All these natural antitheses do not come into account in this relation,—if only one believes on Christ, he is a son of God, let him be what else he may.... All who are in Christ Jesus, are in the same degree 'sons of God,' how different soever they may be in other relations."³¹ Lenski says, "all the Galatians are alike clothed with the garment of Christ's perfect righteousness. In God's eyes they are all alike...all these and similar distinctions and differences are wiped out as to your spiritual standing [i.e., salvation].... Paul is here speaking of the spiritual domain, of God's household *in which all believers are equally sons of God.*"³²

Stephen B. Clark says,

"It [Gal. 3:28] does not even properly qualify as a key text since it does not explicitly address the subject of the roles of men and women.... For a key statement on men's and women's roles, one should look at the passages on personal relationships and social order that are directly concerned with the matter."³³

The OPC Majority Report says,

It must be clear to all that these closing verses of chapter 3 are part of his impassioned argument for the gospel of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.... The same Scripture that reveals that all are sinners announces the good news that salvation is promised to all who believe, whatever their race, social status, or sex.... There is essential agreement that it speaks of the oneness of male and female as beneficiaries of God's grace in Christ. Everyone who believes, without distinction is God's child.... Certainly it would be a mistake to imagine that Paul is suggesting that in Christ the original created male-female relationship is negated.... Redemption does not destroy the creation ordinances of God.³⁴

³⁰ Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980), pp. 206-207, emphasis added.

³¹ Otto Schmoller, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* ([1870] 1978), 2:88.

³² R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, [1937] 1961), pp. 188-189, emphasis added.

³³ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Women in Christ*, pp. 138-139, quoted in OPC Majority Report, p. 906.

³⁴ OPC Majority Report, pp. 906-907.

Ronald Y. K. Fung says,

The statement that there is no "male and female" in Christ does not mean, as was believed in later Gnosticism, that in the new era mankind is restored to the pristine androgynous state; nor does it mean that all male-female distinctions have been obliterated in Christ, any more than that there is no racial difference between the Christian Jew and the Christian Gentile. "In Christ Jesus" emphasizes that Paul views *the elimination of these antitheses from the standpoint of redemption in Christ...* It seem precarious to appeal to this verse in support of any view of the role of women in the church, for two reasons: (a) Paul's statement is not concerned with the role relationship of men and women within the Body of Christ but rather with their common initiation into it through (faith) and baptism; (b) the male/female distinction, unlike the other two, has its roots in creation, so that the parallelism between the male/female pair and the other pairs may not be unduly pressed.³⁵

That Galatians 3:28 speaks of salvation in Christ and *not* the role of women in the governance of the church has been the standard orthodox Protestant interpretation for over 400 years. This view is also supported by Paul's explanation of why women are not to teach or have authority over men in the church.

The basic assumption of those who are attempting to diffuse the regulative principle is that all offices and activities are opened to women by the coming of Christ unless "explicitly excepted." Thus women could speak out in the assembly prior to Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 where women are explicitly forbidden to speak in the church. According to their view women could be preachers, evangelists and elders until it was explicitly forbidden by Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim. 2:11-12, 3:1, etc.). This view is clearly wrong, however, because it is rather obvious that Paul is not writing new regulations but merely dealing with the abuses of existing laws. If Christ had eliminated any role differences between men and women, then Paul could not have appealed to creation ordinances (1 Tim. 2:13, 1 Cor. 11:8-9), the Old Testament law (1 Cor. 14:34), the submission of Christ to God (1 Cor. 11:3), and Eve's deception (1 Tim. 2:14) as reasons for women to "learn in silence with all submission" and for women "not to teach or have authority over men" in the church.³⁶

Unless we assume that Paul is normally incoherent, it would make more sense to begin with the view that Paul had some way of putting together passages like Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, which were probably written within a year or two of one another; and that Galatians 3:28 is *not* directed against those differences of social role for men and women which other scripture passages indicate are based upon the way God created the human race.³⁷

³⁵ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 175-176.

³⁶ Feminists—Christian or otherwise—have the mistaken notion that God's ordained order of authority means or implies that women are inferior to men. According to the Bible, nothing could be further from the truth, for Jesus Christ is under God and submits to God the Father, yet is equal to God in every way. The Bible presents Christ's submission to the Father as a noble thing deserving of honor.

³⁷ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*, p. 150, quoted in OPC Majority Report, p. 909.

Thus Galatians 3:28 cannot be used to turn the regulative principle upside down, and the burden of proof still rests with those who want to put women in the diaconate.

The Lord's Supper Analogy

Another attempt at circumventing the regulative principle is an analogy between the institution of the Lord's supper (cf. Lk. 22:14-20) and the institution of the diaconate in Acts 6:1-6:

Later practice within the New Testament church determines rights to participation in sacraments, not simply the first institution. (There were no women at the Lord's supper when instituted, but they are soon seen later.) The Church of the New Testament is a corporate institution, and all her members have all corporate rights and privileges *unless when explicitly excepted*. How far, however, the enjoyment of these rights and privileges has been limited or otherwise, by such exemptions, can seldom be learned from anything said of the ordinance at its first institution, but is to be gathered from subsequent facts...a woman's right to be deacon is more clear in scripture than their right to the Lord's Supper.³⁸

This analogy is clever but seriously flawed. It is true that only men (Christ and the apostles) were present at the institution of the Lord's supper. But there is nothing whatsoever in the accounts of the last supper to indicate that this new ordinance was for the apostles only or for men only. In fact, Jesus Christ's own explanation of the sacrament clearly indicates that Christian women should and must participate in the Lord's supper.³⁹ "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, even that which is poured out for you" (Lk. 22:20). The cup is for all who believe in Jesus Christ and are cleansed by His blood. Jesus Christ died for both men and women. Those things signified by Christ's death clearly apply to all believers. The Lord's supper symbolically represents Christ's sacrificial death (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26). "It also represents the believer's participation in the crucified

³⁸ *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVI:11 (Nov. 1888), p. 383, quoted in *Cornerstones*, July/Aug. 1989.

³⁹ The assertion that there is more evidence in the New Testament for women deacons than there is for women's participations in the Lord's Supper is truly puzzling. The historical passages in the New Testament which are quoted to prove that women were present during the sacrament have never been disputed. In fact it is impossible to interpret them in any other way than having both sexes present. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about *three thousand souls* were added to them. And *they* continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the *breaking of bread*, and in prayers.... Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common" (Ac. 2:41-44). "While this is a term [the breaking of bread] which, in all probability, does not refer exclusively to the Lord's Supper, but also to the love-feasts, it *certainly* also includes the Lord's Supper" (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939], p. 647). "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together [the many lamps indicate a large gathering]" (Ac. 20:7-8). The passages quoted to prove women deacons (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:11) are easily interpreted in another way besides requiring women deacons. There has never been agreement over the meaning of these passages by commentators. Furthermore, these less clear passages should be interpreted according to the very clear Acts 6:1-6 and not vice versa.

Christ."⁴⁰ It strengthens the Christian's faith and it symbolizes the union of all believers (both male and female) with one another (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17). The Lord's supper seals believers as participants and partakers of all the blessings that Christ attained for His people. Thus the very meaning of the Lord's supper requires that Christian women be present. The apostles were present at the first Lord's supper as the leaders and representatives of the whole church.

For such an analogy to be effectual, one would have to have at the first institution of the Lord's supper a command from Christ that only men (or only apostles) are permitted to partake of the sacraments (e.g., "Seek out...seven men" [Ac. 6:3], an imperative). A genuine analogy would show an instance (even one instance) where God gave clear instructions regarding church office and then later changed His mind and abrogated the earlier instructions. For example, the duties and office of the Levites were clearly restricted to men. A parallel analogy would have to show women Levites performing duties earlier restricted by God to men. The text would have to show that God approved of such a radical change. There are no such examples in the entire Bible. To argue that Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 are evidence of such a radical departure is fallacious. These passages, as will be shown, are definitely *not* speaking of women deacons in the same office as men deacons.

Furthermore, the Lord's supper was founded upon the Passover. Berkhof writes, "Evidently, the Lord did not finish the Passover meal before He instituted the Lord's Supper. The new sacrament was linked up with the central element in the Pascal meal. The bread that was eaten with the lamb was consecrated to a new use. This is evident from the fact that the third cup, generally called "the cup of blessing" was used for the second element in the new sacrament. Thus the sacrament of the Old Testament passed into the New in a most natural way."⁴¹ Under the old covenant no uncircumcised person was permitted to eat of the Passover (Ex. 12:48). All circumcised Israelites who were ceremonially clean and had sanctified themselves to the Lord were permitted to eat of the Pascal meal. Under the new covenant, circumcision has been replaced by baptism. Both men and women are to be baptized (Ac. 8:12, 16:15). Thus, Christian women should also partake of the Lord's supper.

Once again the attempt to circumvent the regulative principle and the importance of the institution of the office of deacon in Acts 6:1-6 is founded upon faulty reasoning and a misrepresentation of Scripture. The idea that very little is learned at the institution of an ordinance (or church office) and that most information must be gathered from subsequent facts is an obvious attempt to downplay the importance of Acts 6:1-6. While it is true that we can learn more about an ordinance or office from subsequent information given in Scripture, the assertion that most information comes from subsequent scriptural data is simply untrue. In the case of having women deacons in the same office as men deacons, they are not merely talking about further information that clarifies (e.g., Paul adds information regarding celebrating the Lord's supper in 1 Cor. 11:27ff.) but further information that *contradicts*. For God to insist that deacons

⁴⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 650.

⁴¹ Berkhof, *op. cit.*, p. 647.

are to be men and then supposedly clarify our understanding of the office with difficult passages such as Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 is extremely hard to believe. To argue in such a way violates standard rules of interpretation and common sense.

Romans 16:1-2

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant [*diakonon*] of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also (NKJV).

Of the two passages in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:11; Rom. 16:1-2) which are used in support of women deacons, Romans 16:1-2 is considered to be much more important as a proof text. That is because Romans 16:1-2 is generally considered to be the clearer of the two passages and because Romans 16:1 specifically refers to Phoebe as a *diakonos*, which can be translated as servant or deacon. B. B. Warfield, who was a strong advocate of women deacons, believed that 1 Timothy 3:11 had nothing to do with women deacons. He believed that the whole scriptural argument for women deacons is found in the phrase "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a deaconess [Gk. *diakonon*] of the church in Cenchrea" (Warfield's translation).

One of the difficulties in interpreting a passage such as Romans 16:1 is the fact that the Greek word *diakonos*, which was used by the early church as a title of a specific church office (i.e., deacon), was also used to describe virtually every form of Christian ministry (e.g., apostle, missionary-evangelist, presbyter, prophet, etc.). The word *diakonos* is used to describe table waiters (Lk. 10:40; Jn. 2:5, 9), servants of sin (Rom. 15:8), servants of the gospel (Gal. 2:17), a servant of the church (Rom. 16:1; Col. 1:25), Paul and Apollos who are servants of both God and the church (1 Cor. 3:5), Epaphras who is a servant of God (Col. 1:7), and Tychicus who is a servant of the Lord (Col. 4:7; Eph. 6:21). The word is applied to Christ, Paul, the apostles, Timothy (1 Th. 3:2), Tychicus (Col. 4:7), Epaphras (Col. 1:7) and of course to Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). The word is used so often to describe people who are not deacons that a careful consideration must be given to all the various indicators within the text to determine if the person is in fact a deacon. In most cases there is no problem because the people in question are described in the immediate context or broader context as apostles or evangelists or table waiters, etc. Thus the English is translated as servant or minister. Of the more than thirty occurrences of *diakonos* in the New Testament, only four occurrences (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12, 13) refer to a specific office-title (i.e., deacon). Whether or not Phoebe was an official deacon, a regular servant, or a servant who holds an office separate from the regular diaconate can only be determined by examining Romans 16:1-2. She is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament. Factors such as the biblical teaching regarding the diaconate and the testimony of church history are useful when dealing with such a disputed passage.

Phoebe's standing in Romans 16:1-2 can be interpreted in one of three ways. First, Phoebe could be an ordained officer in the church, a deacon. Second, she could be someone who

is not connected to any office whatsoever but serves in an unofficial capacity. Third, Phoebe could be an official servant of the church but in a different office than deacon. Remember that the Greek word *diakonos* is often used to describe someone who is not a deacon. The context and indicators within the passage would of course be used to determine what that office is.

Those interpreters who believe that Phoebe was an official deacon usually follow four lines of reasoning. The first (and in the author's opinion, the best) argument used is the official sounding nature of Paul's introduction of Phoebe to the Roman church. Cranfield argues:

It is perhaps just conceivable that the word *diakonos* should be understood here as a quite general reference to her service of the congregation; but it is very much more natural, particularly in view of the way in which Paul formulates his thought (*ousan...diakonan ties ekkliesias*), to understand it as referring to a definite office. We regard it as virtually certain that Phoebe is being described as 'a' (or possibly 'the') deacon of church in question, and that this occurrence of *diakonos* is to be classified with its occurrence in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8 and 12.⁴²

Cranfield also believes that Phoebe's description as a helper (v. 2b) supports his interpretation.

Cranfield and many others on both sides of the debate have succumbed to the fallacy of black and white in their observations of this text. While it is true that Paul's introduction of Phoebe sounds official, it does not necessarily follow that she was an ordained deacon like the seven in Acts. The idea that Phoebe was an ordained deacon in the same office with male deacons raises a number of serious problems. The first problem is that the office which corresponds to the New Testament office of deacon in the Old Testament (the Levitical aid to the poor) and the synagogue (the *chazan*) was always restricted to men. If God was going to open this office to women then why did He restrict it to men in Acts 6:1-6?

Do we not have in v. 3, it is sometimes noted, the explicit instructions of the Apostles to "select from among you, brothers, seven men..." which instructions were carried out in the choosing of seven *males*? Yes, this is certainly the case. And the word used in v. 3 (*andres*, from *aner*) is not the word which is used generically to indicate "person," "human being" (*anthropos*), but is the word which often accents gender, man in contrast to women.... We need not doubt that the Apostles called for the selection of seven *men*.⁴³

While it is possible that God could have opened the office at a later time to women, there is no evidence of such a change in the New Testament. To assert that God changed thousands of years of procedure with this one ambiguous phrase in Romans 16:1 is a grasping after straw. The fact that deacons had authority, that deacons had to be husbands of one wife, that married women are forbidden by Paul to hold any office because of their family responsibilities (cf. 1 Tim. 5:14) is

⁴² C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (T & T Clark, 1979), 2:781.

⁴³ OPC Minority Report, p. 952 (emphasis in original).

dealt with in other sections of this book. The reason Paul's introduction of Phoebe sounds official is because Phoebe belonged to the order of widows described by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:9ff.

The second argument for Phoebe being a deacon in the same office as male deacons is the use of church history. A typical example of such reasoning is found in B. B. Warfield's discussion on women deacons. "Warfield is aware that the Greek noun in that passage can be used in a general sense to mean simply "a helper," but he thinks this is unlikely. Warfield argues that the translation "deaconesses" in this passage finds confirmation in a sentence written by the Roman governor Pliny to the Emperor Trajan around A.D. 112 which refers to two women as "ministers," i.e., official servants in the church."⁴⁴ (The historical section of this book shows that every reference to women deacons prior to the 19th century refers to an office totally separate from the male diaconate. Deaconesses are essentially the same as Paul's order of widows in 1 Tim. 5:9ff.) Warfield's selection of Pliny's letter to Trajan as proof of women deacons is rather puzzling. The Latin word *ministrae*, which describes the women to be executed, is in the Latin just as general as the word *diaconos* in koine Greek. The Latin *ministrae* is so general that the great Latin scholar and church father Jerome used a loan-word *diaconus* from the koine Greek to avoid ambiguities. While Jerome used the specific *diaconus* in his Latin Vulgate translation of Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, he used the more general and ambiguous *ministra* in his translation of Romans 16:1. Jerome did not believe that Phoebe was a deacon.⁴⁵ And there is no reason to believe that the two women mentioned in Pliny's letter were deacons. They, like Phoebe, were probably in the order of widows.

Another common argument used to make Phoebe an ordained deacon hinges on the Greek word *prostasis*. RPCNA seminary professor D. B. Willson argued in 1888 that: "The word succorer (*prostasis*) means, first, a woman set over others, then one who cares for the affairs of others and aids them in her resources."⁴⁶ While it is true that *prostasis* can mean "ruler," "leader," "president," like its masculine counterpart; it can also mean "benefactress," "patron," or "helper." If *prostasis* is interpreted to mean "president" or "leader" in the case of Phoebe, it would not prove that she was a deacon. It would make Phoebe not a deacon but a pope, for the text clearly says that she was a *prostasis* of many and even of the apostle Paul. It would mean that Phoebe had authority over the apostle Paul—an absurd notion. That is why virtually all translators and commentators translate *prostasis* as "helper," "benefactress," "patron," "succorer" and so on.

⁴⁴ Ronald G. Lutjens, "B. B. Warfield on Women Deacons," *Presbyterian Journal*, May 15, 1985, p. 6.

⁴⁵ "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a *servant* of the church which is at Cenchræa" (Rom. 16:1). "...quæ est *ministra* ecclesiae (enchreensis)" (Rom 16:1b). "Likewise must the *deacons* be grave" (1 Tim. 3:8a) "*Diaconos* similiter graves" (1 Tim. 3:8a). "A distinction may be made between all these general uses and the employment of the term as the "fixed designation for the bearer of a specific office" as *diaconos* in the developing constitution of the Church. This is found in passages where the Vulgate has the loan-word *diaconus* instead of the *minister* used elsewhere [cf. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12]" (Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:89).

⁴⁶ D. B. Williams, "Should a Woman Be Ordained a Deacon?" (*Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVI:11 [Nov. 1888]).

A fourth argument rests upon the description of Phoebe's activities by Paul. Phoebe is "a servant [*diakonon*] of the church in Cenchrea." Paul asks the saints in Rome to receive her and to "assist her in whatever she may have need of you." Phoebe's activities are important. Paul asks the church to help her in her mission. Phoebe is described as a "helper of many" and even of Paul. There is no question that her activities sound similar to the activities of deacons. The description of her activities coupled with her official sounding introduction by Paul are the best arguments that she was a deacon. But the interpretation that Phoebe was an ordained deacon in the same office and with the same function as a male deacon raises a number of serious problems. Besides the apparent contradictions with the Old Testament, the synagogues, Acts 6:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12 and 1 Timothy 5:14 (which is dealt with in detail elsewhere) is the fact that female deacons who were in the same office with male deacons are not found anywhere in the early church. As we have seen in the historical section of this book, whenever one encounters a deaconess in the church prior to the nineteenth century she is in a separate office with very different qualifications than male deacons. As demonstrated above, prior to the nineteenth century all deaconesses were patterned after Paul's order of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. (except for a very brief lapse in the Reformed church at Wezel, which led to the abolishing of the office altogether). That means that if Phoebe was a deacon in the same office, with the same responsibilities as a male deacon, then within a generation the office was lost until the nineteenth century. The odds of ordained women deacons who are in the same office with male deacons not surviving in at least some far off corner of the Roman Empire are astounding. However, these problems are resolved if Phoebe was not in the same office as male deacons but belonged to the order of widows described by Paul (1 Tim. 5:9ff.).

All the indicators within Romans 16:1-2 support the interpretation that Phoebe was in the order of widows (cf. 1 Tim. 5:9ff.). Shedd remarks: "Phoebe was probably a widow; because, according to Greek manners, she could not have been mentioned acting in the independent manner described, if either her husband had been living, or she had been unmarried."⁴⁷ Calvin explicitly says that Phoebe belonged to the order of widows:

But this service, of which he speaks as to what it was, he teaches us in another place, in 1 Tim. v. 9, for as the poor were supported from the public treasury of the Church, so they were taken care of by those in public offices, and for this charge widows were chosen, who being free from domestic concerns, and cumbered by no children, wished to consecrate themselves wholly to God by religious duties, they were therefore *received into this office* as those who had wholly given up themselves, and became bound to their charge in a manner like him, who having hired out his own labours, ceases to be free and to be his own master.⁴⁸

Lenski says that Phoebe "was apparently an *unmarried woman* but of *mature years* and thoroughly competent. She could not have traveled alone in those days; and this means that she most likely traveled with her servants. If other Christians had accompanied her, Paul would have

⁴⁷ William G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1879] 1980).

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Romans*, p. 543, emphasis added.

mentioned at least that fact and would have commended also them to the Romans. The only conclusion we can draw is that Phoebe was a woman of means."⁴⁹ Cranfield does not call Phoebe a widow but he does say that she was probably independent: "it seems quite probable that we should be justified in supposing that its choice implies that Phoebe was possessed of some social position, wealth and *independence*."⁵⁰ Conybeare says that Phoebe "was a *widow* of consideration and wealth, who acted as one of the deaconesses of the Church."⁵¹ Hodge calls Phoebe a deaconess, but he defines a deaconess as an *elderly female* (i.e., a widow) who ministers to other women. "It appears that in the apostolic church, *elderly females* were selected to attend upon the poor and sick of *their own sex*."⁵²

The duty of interpreters is to interpret Scripture within both a narrow and a broad context. Scripture is to be used to interpret Scripture. The clearer passages are to be used to shed light on the more difficult and ambiguous passages. Everyone acknowledges that Romans 16:1-2 cannot be properly understood in isolation. When the different interpretations are compared, we should pick the interpretation that best fits in with the more explicit passages on church ecclesiology. Those interpreters who believe that Phoebe was an ordained deacon in the same office with male deacons have a serious problem. The clear passages on the subject (Ac. 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12) contradict their assertion. Thus they are forced to reinterpret the clear passages to somehow not contradict their interpretation of a disputed, ambiguous passage. Those interpreters, such as Calvin and Rutherford, who argue that Phoebe was in the order of widows do justice to the immediate as well as to the broader context. They are not forced into embarrassing exegetical gymnastics to circumvent the clear teaching of Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:12.

Those who argue that Phoebe was a deacon in the same office as the male diaconate make much of her official sounding introduction by Paul. But if Phoebe was in the order of widows her official sounding introduction makes perfect sense.⁵³ There is excellent evidence within the text to indicate that Phoebe was a competent, rich widow. The trip from Cenchrea (a port near Corinth) to Rome was a long one. A married woman in Greek society would not have made such a trip without her husband. Phoebe was rich and independent. It is very unlikely that a young Greek woman would have had such wealth. And it is virtually certain that a young Christian single woman would *not* have made such a trip. The fact that Phoebe was a wealthy

⁴⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Augsburg, 1936), p. 900.

⁵⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:783.

⁵¹ Conybeare, *St. Paul*, 2:154, cited in J. P. Lange, *Romans and Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), pp. 446-447.

⁵² Charles Hodge, *Epistle to the Romans* (Banner of Truth, [1835] 1987), p. 447.

⁵³ The authors of the OPC Minority Report reject the interpretation that Phoebe was in the order (Calvin says "office") of widows: "Calvin believed that Phoebe held the office described in 1 Timothy 5, that of 'widow.' That is most unlikely, however, since that passage reveals that widows were enrolled in order that they might have their financial needs met by the church, whereas the description of Phoebe in Romans 16:2 suggests that she was probably a woman of considerable means" (p. 945). This objection, however, is based on a misunderstanding of 1 Tim. 5:9-15. Paul is discussing an order of widows who serve the church (see the section on 1 Tim. 5:9ff.). Do the authors of the Minority Report believe that food and clothing should be denied to widows who are 59 years old, or to widows who before their conversion were unfaithful to their husband, or to widows who did not have children, etc?

widow, and the fact that she was a patron or helper of many in the church, fits perfectly with the description of Paul's order of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. This is the only interpretation that does justice both to Paul's introduction of Phoebe, her official sounding activities and the very clear teaching regarding male deacons (Ac. 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:12). It also explains why female servants called deaconesses were required to fulfill the qualifications of Paul's order of widows (1 Tim. 5:9ff.) throughout church history (as noted in the historical section of this book). The deaconesses in the post-apostolic church should be defined by their qualifications (widows over sixty) and their duties (ministering to women's needs) and not be defined solely by their name.

The technical name for female servants, *diakonissa*, did not come into existence until after the close of the New Testament canon. The fact that widows were eventually referred to as *diakonissa* (i.e., deaconesses) has caused a lot of confusion among those discussing the women deacon issue.⁵⁴ Should the church have women in the church who serve in a sort of official capacity such as Phoebe? Yes, absolutely. But their office and activities should be patterned after the order of widows and not the male diaconate.⁵⁵ To put women in the same office as the male diaconate does violence to the male diaconate and the biblical order of widows. It was the perversion of the female order of widows which led to its demise.

Summary of Interpretations of Romans 16:1-2		
Ordained Deacon	Unofficial Servant	Order of Widows
Phoebe was an ordained deacon in the same office as male deacons.	Phoebe was a servant in a non-official capacity who did not belong to the diaconate or order of widows.	Phoebe belonged to the order of widows and served in an official capacity, yet was not an ordained deacon in the same office with the male diaconate.
Advantages: This interpretation comports well	Advantages: This interpretation does not	Advantages: This interpretation does justice to

⁵⁴ "The term *diakonos* was a name given to any servant. Its application to Phoebe in Romans 16:1 carries no implication of ordination. The Report [report in favor of women deacons in the rpes, now part of the pca] tries to dispose of this contention on page 134. 'Because the word *diakonos* can be translated either "deacon" or "servant" it is important to note that Paul *did not choose to use the feminine form of the word but rather broke gender to identify Phoebe with the masculine form of the noun* [italics in report]. This very strongly suggests that he was not simply calling her a servant...but was rather using a formal term identifying her as a deacon.' But where in Greek literature does such a feminine form of the word occur? Neither Liddell and Scott, nor Arndt and Gingrich list any feminine form. On the contrary, they both cite passages in which the masculine form applies to women" (Gordon Clark, "The Ordination of Women" in John Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* [Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985], p. 77).

⁵⁵ I considered my interpretation of Rom. 16:1 (that Phoebe was in the order of widows and not a deacon in the same office as male deacons) somewhat unique until I had the opportunity to look at Rutherford's *Due Right of Presbyteries* and Lightfoot's *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines*. While Rutherford (*Due Right of Presbyteries* p. 174), Dr. Temple, Mr. Bridges, Mr. Gibbon and other divines argued that Phoebe was a widow of the servant widow class named in 1 Tim. 5:9ff., *no one* of the assembly of divines ever argued that she was a deacon in the same office as male deacons (Ac. 6:1-6). Both Rutherford and Gillespie were in favor of an order of widows, but the motion failed at the assembly.

<p>with her official sounding introduction by the apostle Paul. It also fits well with her activities of service.</p>	<p>contradict any part of the New Testament.</p>	<p>Phoebe's introduction by Paul and Phoebe's extensive activities on behalf of the church. It does not contradict the teaching in the N.T. regarding the male diaconate (e.g., Ac. 6:1-6). This interpretation does justice to indicators within the text: Phoebe was a wealthy widow engaged in an independent activity that would have been forbidden to younger single women and married women. Her office or order is explicitly described by Paul in 1 Tim. 5:9ff. She meets Paul's qualifications. This interpretation fits in perfectly with church history: godly widows over sixty served the church in an official capacity throughout the Roman empire, especially in the east.</p>
<p>Disadvantages: It contradicts the clear passages given regarding the ordained (e.g., Ac. 6:1-6) diaconate given in the N.T. It also contradicts the testimony of church history: the O.T., the synagogue, and the early church. Deaconesses prior to the nineteenth century were essentially synonymous with Paul's order of widows (cf. 1 Tim. 5:9ff.). They belonged to a separate office from the male diaconate. They had different qualifications (e.g., widows over sixty) and different duties (i.e., primarily to women). They were called deaconesses [<i>diakonessia</i>] not because they were in the same office as male deacons but because their ministry was primarily to poor women.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: The official sounding nature of Phoebe's introduction by Paul must be explained away. The nature and extent of Phoebe's activities in behalf of the church and Paul seem to indicate she was more than a servant who worked in a non-official capacity. The widespread use of godly widows over 60 in the early church who later were called deaconesses [<i>diakonessia</i>] is ignored by this view.</p>	<p>Disadvantages: None.</p>

1 Timothy 3:11

In 1 Timothy 3:11 there are two things that need to be determined in order to understand exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote this passage. First, we must determine whether or not *gunaikas* should be translated as wives or as women. In both classical and koine Greek it can be translated either way. Second, if *gunaikas* is translated women and not wives, what is Paul referring to? Since no interpreters believe Paul is referring to all women in the church the possibilities are: women deacons, women who assist the deacons and serve in an unofficial capacity, and women who assist the deacons who are not deacons but who are the servant-widows described by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. These two factors are closely interrelated; for example, if an interpreter believes that the New Testament teaches that deacons must be men, then his natural choice would be either to argue that *gunaikas* should be translated as wives or that it refers to women who assist the deacons but are not themselves deacons.

Unfortunately in the modern debate over women deacons the possibility that Paul was referring to women who served but were not deacons (e.g., the order of widows) has been totally ignored. Listen to how the question has been framed in the debate. Clark says, "The substantial question now becomes: Does Paul refer to the wives of deacons or to female deacons?"⁵⁶ The OPC Majority Report says, "In 1 Tim. 3:11 the perennial debate, going back at least to the Greek Fathers, is whether 'women' (*gunaikas*) refers to (a) women deacons (deaconesses) or (b) deacons' wives."⁵⁷ The OPC Minority Report says, "What 'women' does the apostle have in view here? Several suggestions have been made in the history of interpretation, but the committee seems clearly to be correct in deciding that only two seem plausible: (1) that women deacons are in view, (2) that deacons' wives are in view."⁵⁸ Before considering the third possibility that Paul was referring to women who served but were not in the same office as male deacons we will briefly consider the other views.

Those who argue that *gunaikas* refers to women deacons in the same office as the men deacons usually follow four lines of argumentation. They argue that if Paul had wives in mind then he would have used the pronoun "their" (*auton*) or at least the article (*tas*) to make it clear that "their" wives is what he had in mind. The use of the adverb "likewise" or "similarly" (*hosautos*) indicates "a third class of ecclesiastical persons.... Since too the passage states the qualifications of elected officials, elders and deacons, the *likewise* introduces qualifications for this third group of officials."⁵⁹ They also consider it unlikely that Paul would give qualifications to deacons' wives while making no mention of elders' wives. Their argument usually ends with a

⁵⁶ Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Jefferson, Maryland: Trinity Foundation, 1983), p. 60.

⁵⁷ OPC Majority Report, p. 921. In fairness to the authors of the Majority Report, they do hint at the possibility of a third alternative under point number 5 of their considerations regarding this passage (cf. p. 922).

⁵⁸ OPC Minority Report, p. 946.

⁵⁹ Gordon Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation), p. 61.

mention of Romans 16:1, Pliny's letter to Trajan and the testimony of early church history. They believe that the testimony of church history strongly supports their interpretation.

The view that Paul is referring to women deacons in the same office as men deacons is almost certainly incorrect for a number of reasons. The appeal to early church history is based on a superficial and flawed understanding of the statements regarding deaconesses made by the various councils, canons and church fathers. The historical section of this book proves that deaconesses were *not* in the same office as deacons; they had a separate office with different qualifications and duties. The appeal to Romans 16:1 and Pliny's letter is not a support because: first, these references are no clearer than 1 Timothy 3:11; and second, they are better interpreted as referring to the servant-widow class of 1 Timothy 5:9ff. which is unambiguous (cf. section on Rom. 16:1), and which does not contradict Acts 6:3 or 1 Timothy 3:12, etc.

The omission of "their" (*auton*) would be significant if the New Testament had been written in English but in koine Greek it is not necessarily significant. Clark argues:

...the word *their* is missing; but first it is not too unusual for Greek to omit an article or demonstrative pronoun. Here there is a possible reason for the omission. Had *their* been in the text, most readers would refer it to the wives of deacons. But before going on with other qualifications for deacons, qualifications that women cannot meet, Paul inserts a note with respect to the wives of both deacons and elders. At any rate, the grammatical omission is far from justifying women deacons. Note also that if extra words are to be inserted into the text, the word *their* changes the meaning of the text far less than the insertion of the word *deacons*. Those who favor the ordination of women mutilate the text to a much greater degree than those who translate *gunaikas* as wives. Indeed this is not a mutilation at all.⁶⁰

If one wants to translate *gunaikas* as wives then Gordon Clark's interpretation that Paul inserts a parenthetical remark to the wives of both elders and deacons makes good sense. Calvin held the same interpretation: "Likewise the wives. He means the wives both of deacons and of bishops, for they must be aids to their husbands in their office; which cannot be, unless their behaviour excel that of others."⁶¹ Paul's counsel is necessary considering the number of pastors whose ministries have been destroyed by the conduct of their wives. To argue that Paul's insertion to the wives of elders and deacons appears out of place is very weak considering the manner in which Paul suddenly switches to another thought in his other epistles.

For those who do not believe that Paul is referring to wives but to women deacons an appeal is made to Paul's use of the adverb *hosautos* (likewise). The grammatical structure used by Paul, which connects verses 2, 8 and 11, is considered by women-deacon advocates to be their strongest evidence for making verse 11 a proof text for women deacons. This point is placed at the forefront of the OPC Minority Report's discussion of verse 11. But while the grammatical structure may indicate that Paul does not have "wives" in mind, it also clearly rules out the possibility that Paul was referring to women deacons in the same office as men deacons.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 87.

Why? Because it indicates that Paul was referring to a distinct *third* class of servants. The OPC Minority Report says, "V. 2 of this chapter begins, "The overseer must be...." V. 8 begins, "Deacons likewise...." V. 11 begins, "Women likewise...." The use of the adverb *hosautos* ("likewise," "similarly") points in *each case* (v. 8 and v. 11) *to another class of officials*, similar in some sense to the first class addressed (that of overseer). In other words, the "women" in v. 11 are introduced as a *class parallel* to the deacons and the elders."⁶² If Paul regarded the women of verse 11 as belonging to the same office as men deacons, he would have addressed them under the same adverb (*hosautos*) and not separately. Therefore verse 11 *cannot* refer to women deacons in the same office as men deacons.

This assertion is supported by a number of Greek scholars. Lenski says, "First: 'Deacons in like manner dignified,' and now: 'Women in like manner dignified.' The wording is exactly the same.... *Dei einai* in v. 2 governs the construction of *diakonous* in v. 8 and of *gunaikas* in v. 11: 'an overseer—deacons—women must be,' etc. *The very construction indicates three offices.*"⁶³ Hendriksen says,

The section with respect to deacons is interrupted by a passage stating the requirements in the case of women. That these women are not "the wives of deacons" nor "all the adult female members of the church" is clear from the syntax: "The overseer *must be*.... Deacons similarly (must be).... Women similarly (must be)...." One and the same verb coordinates the three: the overseers, deacons, women. Hence, these women are here viewed as rendering special service in the church, as do the elders and the deacons. *They are a group by themselves*, not just the wives of the deacons nor *all* the women who belong to the church.⁶⁴

If the syntax indicates that these women are in "a group by themselves" then these "women" are *not* "overseers" or "deacons." The *Expositor's Greek Testament* says, "These [women] are the deaconesses...of whom Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) is an undoubted example. They performed *for the women* of the early church the same sort of ministrations that the deacons did for the men. In confirmation of this view it should be noted that *hosautos* is used in *introducing a second or third member of a series*.... The series here of church officials."⁶⁵ If the *Expositor's* reference to "deaconesses" is defined in the same manner as it was in the early church, i.e., a separate office with the qualifications of 1 Timothy 5:9ff., then his comments are correct. If not, his comments regarding a third member of a series still support my interpretation. Fairbairn concurs: "On the other, the mode of expression employed in introducing the women, *gunaikas hosautos*, apparently *marking a transition to another class* (as at ver. 8, ii 9; Tit. ii 3, 6)."⁶⁶

⁶² OPC Minority Report, p. 946.

⁶³ R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, [1937] 1961), pp. 598-600.

⁶⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), p. 132.

⁶⁵ Newport J. D. White, *Expositor's Greek Testament: The First and Second Epistles to Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 115-116.

⁶⁶ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1878] 1952), p. 150.

If (as noted above) the syntax indicates three offices or three classes of servants or three separate categories it is logically and exegetically impossible to regard "women" in v. 11 as referring to women deacons *in the same office* as men deacons. If women were in the same office as male deacons, why would they be treated separately? "They fail to note that if some women were deacons, further qualifications would be unnecessary. One does not state the qualification of a United States Senator and then add something additional for red-haired senators, western senators, or women senators."⁶⁷ Ironically, 1 Timothy 3:11 is an excellent proof text *against* having women deacons in the same office as men deacons.

If Paul is not referring to the wives of elders and deacons, and is not referring to women deacons in the same office as men deacons, then what does this third category of officers or servants refer to? The most logical and natural alternative would be to regard "women" as referring to the servant-widow class that assists the deacons by ministering to the needs of women. "The simplest explanation on the manner in which Paul, not yet finished with the requirements for the office of deacons, interjects a few remarks about women, is that he regards these women as the *deacons' assistants* in helping the poor and needy, etc. *These are women who render auxiliary service*, performing ministries for which women are better adapted. Here again we refer to our explanation of 1 Tim. 5:9. A few simple words indicate their necessary qualifications."⁶⁸ Paul makes a parenthetical remark to a third class of servants. The only female third class of servants in the entire New Testament is the servant-widows mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. Since they are the only third class mentioned, and since their duties are diaconal in nature, it is quite natural that Paul would mention them in his comments regarding deacons. The reason they do not receive a separate paragraph with detailed qualifications like the elders and men deacons is because Paul goes into greater detail regarding their qualifications in 1 Timothy 5:9ff.

The interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11 as referring to "women" who assist the deacons who belong to the order of widows described in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. is also exegetically superior to the "women in the same office" view when the broader contextual matters are considered. If Paul was addressing women who were in the same office with the same qualifications as the men deacons, then the book of 1 Timothy contains a serious internal contradiction. In 1 Timothy 5:9ff., Paul forbids women under sixty to hold a church office (or to be separated to official service). He tells younger women to get married and to manage the house (cf. 5:14). If married women with children who were under sixty were ordained deacons, Paul's comments in 1 Timothy 5:9-14 could not have been written (see section on 1 Tim. 5:9ff.). The word of God cannot contradict itself. If 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to the order of widows who assist the deacons, then both passages are in complete harmony.

⁶⁷ Gordon Clark, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 61.

⁶⁸ Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 133, emphasis added. Fairbairn agrees: "And considering the greater separation which then existed between the sexes, and the extreme jealousy which guarded the approaches to female society, it was in a manner indispensable that women, with some sort of delegated authority, should often be entrusted with various kinds of diaconal service" (*Pastoral Epistles*, p. 150).

A basic principle of biblical interpretation is that when choosing between two interpretations, the interpretation that best fits with other passages on the subject is the preferred choice (Scripture interprets Scripture). Those who believe that women should be ordained deacons in the same office as men deacons have always had difficulty dealing with Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:12. God knows and controls whatsoever comes to pass. God is not the author of confusion. The idea that God eventually intended to have women deacons in the same office as men deacons but specifically chose seven men at the institution of the office is clearly artificial. There were hundreds of qualified women present at that gathering. When the word of God says seven men were chosen, women, according to the regulative principle, are excluded (see section on Ac. 6:1-6). Paul says, "Let deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." If women served in the same office as men, Paul's statement that deacons must be husbands doesn't make any sense. These factors, coupled with the fact that the deacon's office has an authority forbidden to women, make the interpretation that Paul was referring to women deacons in the same office as men deacons the worst choice among the views considered. If Paul was referring to the wives of elders and deacons, or the servant-widow class (1 Tim. 5:9ff.), then the broader contextual problems disappear.

The servant-widow interpretation also has the advantage of the support from the testimony of church history. If women served in the same office as men deacons, would there not be some examples found in the early church? There are *no* examples of women deacons *in the same office* as men deacons prior to the nineteenth century (see historical section above). The deaconesses encountered in the early church had to fulfill the qualification not of the deacon's office but the order of widows described in 1 Timothy 5:9ff.

Therefore, when the immediate context, the larger context, and the testimony of church history are considered, the weight of evidence against the "women deacons in the same office as men deacons" interpretation is enormous. It is not "an exegetical standoff," as some assert. The "women deacons in the same office" interpretation is clearly incorrect and thus unscriptural.

Elder	Deacon	Servant-Widow
1. The husband of one wife (3:2).	1. Husband of one wife (3:12).	1. The wife of one man (5:9).
2. Who rules his own house well having children in submission with all reverence (3:4).	2. Ruling their children and their own houses well (3:12).	2. If she has brought up children (5:10).
3. Blameless (3:2).	3. Blameless (3:10).	3. Faithful in all things (3:11).
4. Of good behavior (3:2).	4. Let these first be proved (3:10).	4. Well reported for good works (5:10).

5. Hospitable (3:2).		5. If she has lodged strangers, washed the saints' feet, etc. (5:10).
6. Temperate (3:2).		6. Temperate (3:11).
	7. Reverent (3:8).	7. Reverent (3:11).
	8. Not double tongued (3:8).	8. Not slanderers (3:11).
9. He must have a good testimony among those who are outside (3:7).	9. Holding the mystery of faith with a pure conscience (3:9).	9. Younger women are not permitted to join the servant-widow class because their actions can give "opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (cf. 5:13-14).
10. Not greedy for money (3:3).	10. Not greedy for money (3:8).	
11. Not given to wine (3:3).	11. Not given to much wine (3:8).	

The Order of Widows (1 Timothy 5:9-10)

In 1 Timothy 5:3-16 Paul instructs Timothy regarding the proper treatment of five types of widows. In verse 4 Paul tells Timothy that widows who have children or grandchildren should be provided for by them. Children and grandchildren have a biblical responsibility to "honor their progenitors." Under such circumstances it is neither the state's nor the church's responsibility but the family's responsibility to provide for their parents and grandparents. This teaching is so important it is reported by Paul two more times. "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows" (1 Tim. 5:16).

In verse 5 Paul discusses the widows who are widows indeed. These are widows who do not have any family member (e.g., children or grandchildren) to support them. These widows can only turn to God and his people for help. They should be supported by the church. In verse 6 Paul mentions widows who should not receive church support. These widows are false Christians who dedicate their lives to pleasure rather than Christ. The church should never subsidize the wicked. Paul deals with young widows in verses 11 through 15. Young widows should get married, bear children and manage their house. While it is noble that some of these younger

widows desire to serve in the order of widows (v. 9-10), the Holy Spirit wants them in the home. Strong Christian families are vital to the church and society.

After Paul instructs Timothy regarding how widows are to be provided for (v. 3-8), he lays down various requirements for the widows who serve the church.⁶⁹ "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, 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 (vs. 9-10)." These widows are "taken into the number." The verb *katalegestho* can mean, "to choose, to note or register in a list...as, e.g., citizens, soldiers, taxpayers, are classed together, and thus *publicly distinguished from others*."⁷⁰ These women are placed on a list. They are publicly set apart from other women in the church. The question that remains to be answered is: are these widows placed on a list in order to receive aid or in order to serve the church? All the evidence indicates that what Paul clearly had in mind was an order of widows set apart in order to serve the church.

There are a number of reasons why this interpretation is superior. Why would Paul give Timothy a set of requirements regarding which widows were to receive aid after he had just done so in verses 4 through 8? Also, the qualifications given in verses 9 and 10 clearly point in the direction of service. The church elder and deacon must be the husband of one wife. The widow who serves must have been the wife of one man (v. 9). "The cause of this rule was without doubt the same as in the case of the presbyter and deacon."⁷¹ Only women who first had proved themselves as good and faithful wives could be admitted to the order. Would it make sense to deny women sustenance on the basis that they had never married, or if *before* their conversion they had been unfaithful to their husbands? And what about the age requirement? The idea that women under sixty would be denied food and clothing simply because of their age is absurd. But if Paul is speaking about service the age of sixty makes perfect sense. Widows over sixty (whose children had grown) are free from family responsibilities. The temptation to remarry is remote and they are beyond the childbearing age. Women over sixty were accorded a certain respect in Greek society.⁷² For example, it would have been considered improper for young women to travel or be apart from their families. Old women could act independently and travel without causing a stir. Phoebe is an excellent example of such independence (Rom. 16:1-2).

Paul stipulates that only women who have raised children can be placed on the list. This requirement echoes the qualification to both elders (3:4) and deacons (3:12). If Paul were giving a prerequisite for those widows who were to receive aid, then we would expect the very opposite.

⁶⁹ "[Verse] 9) There is no connective; hence, as in v. 3, we have a new topic..." (Lenski, *1 Timothy*, p. 665).

⁷⁰ J. J. Van Oosterzee, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1860] 1978), p. 58, emphasis added. Lenski says: "The verb [*katalegestho*] means 'to be elected' and thus 'to be enrolled' or entered on a list...e.g., citizens, soldiers, taxpayers, are classed together, and thus publicly distinguished from others" (*op. cit.*, p. 666).

⁷¹ J. J. Van Oosterzee, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁷² It is interesting to note that Plato, in his concept of the ideal state, said that the ideal age for men and women to become priests and priestesses was sixty. In the ancient world age sixty was regarded as the age at which it was no longer possible for women to bear children. Furthermore, Orientals regarded the age of sixty as an appropriate time for retiring from the world for quiet contemplation.

Women without children and relatives were often the most destitute. Would it be fair to deny widows aid solely on the basis of being unable to bear children? The reason Paul gives such a requirement is that one of the responsibilities of the order of widows was to instruct and aid young mothers. "She must be experienced in this line if she is to give counsel and direction to others."⁷³ Older women who had been faithful wives and who had brought up children were experienced in applying biblical truth to family living. Their experience was essential in training the younger women in godliness (cf. Tit. 2:3-5). The sanctified experience of being a faithful wife and raising up children as a mother is something men do not have. Elders and deacons, no matter how experienced, have never given birth or breast fed a baby, etc. If the church had a biblical, functioning order of widows, women would not fall prey to so much secular nonsense (e.g., Dr. Spock).

In verse 10 Paul sets forth a number of requirements all dealing with reputation.⁷⁴ Once again the requirements for the order of widows echoes those for both elder (3:2) and deacon (3:10). The member of the order of widows must be "well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work" (1 Tim. 5:10). What if a widow was a recent convert and did not have such a stellar reputation? Is Paul telling Timothy to let such women beg on the street? What about widows who were from poor families? Some families, due to conditions beyond their control, are not able to be as hospitable as they desire. It is clear that Paul is setting forth requirements for service. This explains the similarities between the qualifications for elders, deacons and the order of widows.

In verse 11 Paul tells Timothy that younger widows are not permitted to be placed on the list. The main reason given by Paul is that younger widows desire to marry. The clear implication of verses 11 and 12 is that any widow who is placed on the list of widow-servants must take a vow of celibacy. That is, they promise not to remarry. Hendriksen paraphrases verses 11 and 12 as follows: "But younger widows you must refuse (to place on the list); for often when, contrary to (their pledged devotion to) Christ, they grow restless with desire, they want to

⁷³ Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 175. Lenski says: "'Whether she brought up children' is naturally the first question, for good motherhood is women's great province" (*op. cit.*, p. 668).

⁷⁴ Some commentators even argue that the requirements of verse 10 indicate that the widows in the order were relatively well-off financially. "Poverty and destitution are ruled out, for when hospitality was needed, guests would not be directed to poor homes by elders when there were well-to-do homes to welcome the guests. The suggestion that these women who were now widows became poverty-stricken since their widowhood, is untenable" (Lenski, p. 669). "Does not verse 10 indicate that the widows of which this section speaks were comparatively well to do?" (Hendriksen, p. 173). While it is true that the poor certainly are able to be hospitable, those who are economically well off are in a better position to do acts of charity. Widows whose children had grown, who were of means, had the independence necessary to wholly devote themselves to church service. Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2) fits this description perfectly. She was a godly widow of means who served the church. Her independence enabled her to travel to Rome. We do not know if women in the order of widows were supported by the church or if they were financially independent. The obvious objection to this view is that it reeks of favoritism to the well-off. One could also argue that elders and deacons would have to be well-off for they have to be hospitable also. But it could be argued that having one's house in order also involves economic or financial competence. In either case, the financial argument from v. 10 is not necessary to prove my point, the other evidence being so abundant.

get married (again)."⁷⁵ If the widows described in 5:9ff. are only placed on a list in order to receive charity (and not as widow-servants), then why is a vow to remain unmarried necessary? *If those on the list were receiving charity, we would expect Paul to encourage remarriage as soon as possible to relieve the financial burden of the church.* A vow of celibacy makes no sense whatsoever if the list consisted of widows who were to receive church funds. But if these older widows (over 60) were dedicating their lives to serving the poor and sick, the vow makes perfect sense. These older widows are beyond the age of child bearing. They do not have any family responsibilities. Therefore they have the independence necessary to wholly dedicate themselves to the service of Christ. Younger widows, on the other hand, are to get married and raise a family (v. 14).

The primary reason that younger widows are told to get married is not in order to relieve the financial burden of the church which is what would be expected if those permitted on the list were only receiving charity. God wants younger widows to get married and raise a family because that is their natural desire as young women. "Woman's greatest service to the race is that of motherhood. She may still do any voluntary work that does not interfere with her duty to her husband and children; but she is not free to assume another life-work."⁷⁶ Paul gives another reason why the younger widows are not permitted to serve in the order: because they became idle. Instead of instructing other women and being good examples they went about from house to house gossiping. They were busybodies. This indicates that the age requirement of sixty came about not only because this was beyond the child bearing age but also from practical experience. It is obvious from these observations that Paul is discussing an order of service and not a list for charity.

The interpretation that 1 Timothy 5:9 is speaking of a distinct group of women set apart in the church for service was common among early Presbyterians. It was held by John Calvin, George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford. Samuel Rutherford argued that the college of widows spoken of in 1 Timothy 5:9 definitely refers to a group of women set apart to serve in the church. He even argues that Phoebe of Romans 16:1 probably "was such a widow."

But some may object, if these widows had a charge [i.e., a defined duty], and did any work or service to the Church, (as it is clear from the text, v. 9 they did) in overseeing the poor, and the sick, were not wages due to them, for their work? For the laborer is worthy of his hire...[therefore it is] as a debt, not as an alms. I answer, the reason is not alike of the preaching elder, and of the widow; for the pastor's service requiring the whole man was of that nature...but a widow of sixty years being weak and infirm, cannot acquit herself, in such a painful office as does merit poor wages, and therefore the reward of her labour was both wages and alms.

Again, that this widow had some charge or service in the church, (I mean not any ministerial office, for she was not ordained as the deacon, Acts 6 with imposition of hands) I prove from the text. 1. Because this widow was not to be chosen to the number of college of widows,

⁷⁵ Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁷⁶ D. S. Faris, "The Female Deacon, Animadversions on the Arguments of Synod's Committee" (*Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVII:5 [May 1889]), p. 140.

except she had been 60 years [of age], this is a positive qualification of a positive service, as if it were an office; for else what more reason in 60 years than in 61 or 62 or in 58 or 59 if she was a mere eleemosynary [i.e., someone who is dependent or supported by alms] and an indigent woman, for can godliness permit us to think that Paul would exclude a widow of 50 or 54 or 56 years, from the college of widows, who were desolate and poor? Nor, 2. Would Paul rebuke the widow taken into the society of these widows, because she married a husband, except she had entered into this service, and had vowed chastity, nor is marrying the second time which is lawful (Rom. 7:1-2), a waxing wanton against Christ and a casting off of the first faith; as the marrying of these widows is called (vs. 11-12), therefore this widow had some charge and service in the church. 3. The word *katalegestho*—let a widow be chosen of such an age, and not younger, and with such moral qualifications, as is required in the deacon, does also evidence that it was an election to some service of charge, as if she be of good report, if she has brought up her children; if she has lodged strangers; if she has washed the saints' feet; which qualifications not being in a widow [who is] poor and destitute, which cannot exclude her from the [church's] alms, and expose her to famishing for want: (this also does [argue] Ambrose, Augustine)... It is not unprobable to me that Phoebe, called a deacon, or servant of the church of Cenchrea, was such a widow, seeing she is (Rom. 16:1) expressly so called: how she came to Rome, if she was a poor widow and now 60 years old, I dispute not, seeing God's Spirit called her so. We can easily yield that widows of sixty years entering to this service did vow not to marry again; The last canon of the council of Nice denies that widows are church-officers, because they were not ordained with imposition of hands....⁷⁷

D. B. Willson, professor of theology at the RPCNA seminary, spoke on the subject of women deacons ("Should a Woman Be Ordained a Deacon?") at the opening session of the school year 1888-1889. When Professor Willson discussed the experience required for women deacons he quoted from 1 Timothy 5:9ff.: "Let not a widow be taken into the number under three-score years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work."⁷⁸ Then Professor Willson commented,

Mark the qualifications of one spoken of as taken into the number, "three-score years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works, have brought up children...." Now, we ask, must a widow, to be supported, be sixty years of age; again, must a widow, to be supported, have all these qualifications of a past efficient life? *Does the passage not read rather as giving a list of qualifications for office*, and is not the connection this, that of widows supported there were a number supported, as employed? These must be persons of experience, to thus serve the church, even though dependent. The younger widows would look to marriage, as we know this was universal.... To-day, as then, married women, as a rule, have family duties that engage their time and strength, and prevent them from formally engaging to discharge

⁷⁷ Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries, or a Peaceable Plea for the Government of the Church of Scotland* (1644), pp. 173-174.

⁷⁸ *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, Nov. 1888, p. 404.

exacting official duties. They are deacons at home, ministering in the honored place of the mother, to the best interests for time and eternity of the children.... There is no holier service for a woman....⁷⁹

What is puzzling regarding Professor Willson's comments is the fact that the RPCNA not only ordains women under sixty years of age as deacons but also ordains women under sixty who are married with children. The fact that women under sixty were permitted to be ordained as deacons is explained as follows: "Today [i.e., 1888], fitness does not only come late in life, but far earlier, by special education and from enlarged facilities." If Professor Willson means what I think he means, he not only has contradicted his earlier statement regarding mothers as being too busy to hold church office, but also has violated the regulative principle. If the apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, says that only widows 60 years of age and older can serve in the college of widows, it is not our prerogative to change this requirement without scriptural warrant. Willson's argument is nothing more than pragmatism. Furthermore, if young women could be trained in 1888 to serve as widows, they could also have been so trained in A.D. 65. Willson also makes the mistake of equating the college of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9 with the ordained office of deacon. The ordained office of deacon consisted of men who handled the financial affairs of the church and aid to the poor. Servant widows were probably not ordained. They did not handle the financial affairs of the church. And their ministry was directed to women (the fact that they were eventually called deaconesses after the close of the canon is dealt with in the historical section of this book).

What does Professor Willson do with the requirement that widows who serve must remain unmarried (i.e., celibate)? If 1 Timothy 5:9-14 applies to women deacons, as professor Willson maintains, then why does the RPCNA ordain married women? Apparently Professor Willson does not see any contradiction between his interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:14 and the fact that the RPCNA ignores this requirement. Willson says that "married women, as a rule, have family duties that engage their time and strength, and prevent them from formally engaging to discharge exacting official duties. They are deacons at home."⁸⁰ Later, he argues that "There is no call or warrant for the vow of celibacy. The work is free. The rule is for women as for men. Protestantism has no vow or promise of celibacy for church officers. There is to be none for women entering the service of the church."⁸¹ Whether Willson's comments are directed at the abuses of Romanism is unclear. But what is clear is that Paul only permits widows over sixty, who promise not to marry a second time, to serve the church in an official capacity. Any church that allows a woman under 60 who is married to serve the church in an official capacity as a servant-widow or deaconess violates the clear teaching of the word of God.

While Professor Willson should be commended for his interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:9ff., his use of pragmatism to ignore the qualifications of servant-widow is disturbing. If better training facilities can be used to ignore the word of God regarding female qualifications for

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 404-405.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 404.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 406.

service in the church, then why stop with ordained women deacons—why not female pastors and elders also? The beauty of the regulative principle is that it draws the line where God draws the line. The slow encroachment of innovations that leads to Romanism and other abuses cannot develop in a church that strictly adheres to God's word in *every* area of church polity and worship. (Our prayer should be that the RPCNA would apply the regulative principle as strictly to church government and papal holy days [e.g., Christmas, Easter] as it does with Psalm singing and the use of musical instruments.)

If the order of widows spoken of in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. is a biblical office or service within God's church, would it not be better for Reformed churches to reintroduce this biblical order with its specific qualifications than to seek to ordain women to the male diaconate which has no scriptural warrant, and which cannot be found in the church until the nineteenth century? There are no passages in the New Testament that indicate that the college of widows was a temporary institution. The servant-widows were not connected in any way to special revelations (e.g., prophets) and miracles which ceased with the close of the canon and the death of the apostles. They were not bound up with the ministrations of the apostles in a special way, as were the first evangelists. Do we have the scriptural right to ignore or set aside a ministry to and for women which is founded upon inspired revelation?

Those who are in favor of women deacons who are in the same office as men deacons reject the idea of an order of widows. Why? Because they want women deacons to have the same office, function, and qualifications as the male diaconate. The deaconesses in the early church had different qualifications (widows over sixty), different functions (primarily to women), different authority (they submitted to the male deacons) and a different office than the male deacons. Modern advocates of women deacons believe that it is perfectly permissible for women who are married, who have dependent children and who are under sixty to be deacons. Yet such thinking clearly contradicts Paul's command to the younger widows in 1 Timothy 5:11-14: "But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Paul does not permit younger widows into the order. Why? They may break their vow of celibacy by getting remarried (vv. 11-12).⁸² They have a different temperament than the older widows. They learn to be idle, "not only idle but also gossips and busybodies" (v. 13).

What does Paul instruct young widows to do? He says, "Get married, bear children and manage the house" (v. 14). Women under sixty are forbidden to hold office in the church. Paul's instruction to young women is *not* to manage the financial affairs of the church but to manage

⁸² "It seems better to suppose, with most expositors, that the allusion is to the vow, which was implicit, included in their reception into the common order of widows. They have thereby dedicated themselves exclusively to the service of Christ and His Church; and as they had freely chosen this work, knowing its duties and its restrictions, a second marriage was in this view a breach of troth to Christ" (Lange, *1 Timothy*, p. 60).

the affairs of the home.⁸³ “‘To rule the house’ means as the wife and mother in the home, to manage the household affairs. This is the domain and province of woman, in which no man can compete with her. Its greatness and its importance should ever be held up as woman's divinely intended sphere, in which all her womanly qualities and gifts find full play and happiest gratification.”⁸⁴ The woman who is married with children has a job that is so important and time consuming that God wants her wholeheartedly focused on her task of managing the household. “No such requirement is listed for women deacons because mothers with children found their duties in the home and *not* in the diaconate.”⁸⁵

Are the advocates of women deacons willing to argue that younger women are forbidden to be in the order of widows because they should be at home with their children, but are permitted to be ordained deacons in the church with even more authority and responsibilities than the widows? Does it make sense for Paul to say to the younger widows that they should get married and manage the affairs of the household when in the same church young married women were already serving as ordained deacons? If women wanted to serve as widows but were too young, could they not serve first as deacons? Why does Paul not instruct the younger women who want to serve in the order of widows to become deacons and then join the order when they attain the age of sixty?

Whenever one encounters a deaconess throughout church history prior to the nineteenth century, she is a widow over 60 years of age.⁸⁶ The reason for this fact is simple: the church through nearly all of its history regarded 1 Timothy 5:9-14 as binding on deaconesses. Those who would put women into the male diaconate with the same qualifications as men deacons really have no choice but to reject the servant-widow interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:9ff., for it would be absurd for Paul to forbid married women under sixty to serve as widows if they were already serving as ordained deacons. The only alternative would be to do what Professor D. B. Willson did when he altered the qualifications because of purely pragmatic considerations. This alternative is of course off limits to Presbyterians who take the regulative principle seriously.

⁸³ In Paul's epistle to Titus we learn that God's attitude toward young women is very different than that of our feminist-influenced culture. Women please God by being discreet, chaste homemakers who are obedient to their husbands: "the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit. 2:3-5 NKJV). This teaching is completely in harmony with Pr. 31. The virtuous wife is involved in commerce and helping the poor, but it is clear that her priority is the household. "She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household.... She watches over the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness" (Pr. 31:15, 27).

⁸⁴ Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 676.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 594.

⁸⁶ The age was lowered from 60 to 40 at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) without scriptural warrant. There is no reason implied within the passage to regard the age as metaphorical. Calvin, Rutherford, Gillespie, the Puritans and the Baptists who believed in an order of widows all took the age requirement literally. Those who rejected the age requirement because of pragmatic considerations destroyed the order of widows. They ended up not with experienced older women who minister to women's needs, but with women who acted like men deacons.

Ordination and Authority

There can be no discussion of women deacons without a consideration of ordination. After examining some definitions of ordination we will discuss how it has been used in the modern debate. Then we shall determine how the Reformed doctrine of ordination reflects on both women deacons (which has no biblical support) and the order of widows (which has biblical support). The question is: should women be ordained? The editor of the *Second Book of Discipline* noted,

The first Book of Discipline had indicated earlier how 'Ordinarie Vocation consisteth in Election, Examination and Admission', and the second Book of Discipline similarly defined 'ordinarie and outward calling' as election and admission after due examination 'be the judgement of the elderschip and consent of the congregatioun' [sic], to be followed by ordination or the solemn setting apart of the candidate to his office in the church, 'the separatioun and sanctifeing of the persone appointit of God and his kirk' [sic]. By 'eldership' is understood the assembly of ministers, doctors and elders from several contiguous congregations; and by 1582 the general assembly had assigned the examination of candidates to 'particular presbyteries'....⁸⁷

Certainly, in Scotland what spiritual grace a candidate possessed was thought to be observable before his admission in his performance on the exercise and not to be the product of any ordination ceremony. *The imposition of hands was not held to convey the gifts of the Holy Spirit but acted only as a recognition and seal of the spiritual gifts already present....* Clearly, as the second Book of Discipline had illustrated, what remained paramount was not the imposition of hands but the idea of vocation and the two aspects of the call to the ministry. Even so, there can be little doubt that ordination with the laying on of hands had become an accepted practice within the church of Scotland before the end of the sixteenth century.⁸⁸

George Gillespie (1613-1649)

“The outward calling is made up of election and ordination.... Let the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul be read, how ministers were elected and ordained....”⁸⁹

“The act of ordination standeth in the mission to the deputation of a man to an ecclesiastical function with power and authority to perform the same; and thus are pastors ordained when they are sent to a people with power to preach the word, minister the sacraments, and exercise ecclesiastical discipline among them. For 'How shall they preach except they be sent?'”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *The Second Book of Discipline*, with introduction and commentary by James Kirk (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews, 1980), p. 66.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73, emphasis added.

⁸⁹ George Gillespie, *Ceremonies*, p. 162/2, cited in Gordon Clark, "The Ordination of Women" in John Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), p. 90.

⁹⁰ Gillespie, *Ceremonies*, p. 165/1, in *Ibid.*, p. 91.

John Owen (1616-1683)

“Ordination in Scripture compriseth the whole authoritative translation of a man from among the number of his brethren into the state of an officer in the church.”⁹¹

Committee of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1644)

“Ordination, for the substance of it, is the solemnization of an officer's outward call, in which the elders of the church, in the name of Christ, and for the church, do, by a visible sign, design the person, and ratify his separation to his office; with prayer for, and blessing upon, his gifts in the ministration thereof. Acts vi. 3, 6, Numb. viii. 10-19, Acts xiii. 1-3.”⁹²

Samuel Miller (1769-1850)

“Dr. Samuel Miller (1769-1850), professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government in Princeton Seminary in his *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (1831) defined ordination: ‘That solemn rite, or act, by which a candidate for any office in the Church of Christ, is authoritatively designated to that office, by *those who are clothed with power for the purpose*’ (p. 275). Those who ordain have the power to ordain others to the same office. Just like a civil judge the elder is clothed with power to execute his office. “They are fully invested with the office, and with all the powers and privileges *which it includes....* [O]rdination is an act not only *official*, but also *authoritative....*”⁹³

James Henley Thornwell

“It was generally conceded that ordination was the act of a court—that it was neither analogous to preaching, nor to the administration of the sacraments, nor to any other function which pertained to Ministers in their individual relations as Preachers of the Word. It was a joint and not a several power.”⁹⁴

“Then we are required to say whether we believe with the Papists that ordination is a sacrament; with the Prelatists that it belongs to the power of order; with the Independents that it belongs to the people; or with the great body of the Reformed Church that it belongs to the

⁹¹ John Owen, *Works*, XIII:219, quoted in OPC Majority Report, p. 915.

⁹² Lightfoot, *Journal of the Assembly*, p. 115.

⁹³ OPC Majority Report, p. 915, emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ *Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Banner of Truth, [1875] 1986), 4:78.

power of jurisdiction, is an act of government, and must be administered by the legitimate courts of God's house.... We are required to say whether we are Presbyterians or not."⁹⁵

"What, then, is ordination? It deserves to be remarked, in the first place, that the very term itself obviously implies—what every definition, whether Protestant or Papal, Prelatic, Presbyterian or Congregational, assumes as a conceded proposition—that the ministry of the Gospel is an *ordo*. The different gradations which the Churches of England and of Rome have introduced into the general office of the clergy are accordingly styled *holy orders*. In these applications the word *ordo* is used in a sense analogous to that in which it was employed to indicate the rank of a Roman senator. The clergy, as Knapp suggests, seem to correspond to it, while the mass of the people, the laity, are distinguished from them, not as another order, but by the absence of that which, in the other case, is the ground of separation."⁹⁶

"Hence, upon our principles, ordination must sustain a very different relation to the *ordo* from that which is ascribed to it in the Churches of England and Rome. As, with us, it is God through the Spirit who imparts the ministerial commission and conveys the right to discharge the duties of the office, as God, and God alone, can communicate the distinctive qualities of the *ordo*, ordination, with us, can only be an acknowledgment of the fact that a man *is* a Minister of God and entitled to rule and to teach in His Church. We do not undertake to put into the hands of Ministers their Divine warrant for their work; we only receive and set our seal to the credentials which God has given. In our use of the term ordination and that of the Prelatists there is a difference of meaning analogous to that which obtains between Protestants and Romanists in their use of the much more important term justification. To justify, with the one, is to make righteous, as to ordain is to create a Minister; to justify, with the other, is to pronounce righteous, as to ordain is to declare a man a Minister. *Hence, Presbyterian ordination imparts nothing—whether character, power, grace or privilege.* It is neither a charm nor a commission; it is a simple acknowledgment of what God has done. As a right is comparatively worthless whose existence is not recognized by others—the logical maxim *de non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio* being universally applicable—it is of the utmost importance to the success and efficiency of a Minister that his Divine authority be admitted. *Hence, God has appointed ordination as a public recognition on the part of His Church of the rights which He has supernaturally conferred.* It is the established mode in which it is made to appear that He has called and anointed the subject of it for the work of the ministry.

As it is evidently, therefore, the decision of a question of fact concerning the Divine right of an individual to be ranked in the *ordo*, two elements must enter into it—the investigation of the evidence, and the formal rendering of the judgment. The decision must be made in conformity with the laws of Christ. He has prescribed the principles on which it must depend. He has

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4:80.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 94.

defined the qualities which characterize the *ordo* and settled the mode in which the knowledge of their existence can be acquired. The whole process in the investigation of the evidence and the declaration of the verdict is only an application of the laws of Christ, and is consequently committed to the same hands with the general administration of government. Ordination is a judicial decision, and therefore belongs to a court. Imposition of hands is the formal rendering of the judgment; and as the judgment is the judgment of the whole court, it must be rendered as the decision of the whole, though a particular individual may be selected as the organ....

Every other doctrine must make ordination the commission of the ministry. The mystical jargon about the transmission of authority, the communication of power, the delegation of office, is essentially Prelatic; and we can conceive of no theory of ordination which renders it incompatible for an Elder to partake in it, which does not assume that its relation to the *ordo* is that for which Prelatists and Romanists contend.”⁹⁷

“It is not in the power of any or of all the churches in the world to appoint any office, or officer, in the Church, that Christ hath not appointed. And where there are any such, they can have no church-authority properly so called, for that entirely riseth from, and is resolved into, the institution of the office by Christ Himself. And hence, in the first place, all the authority of officers in the Church proceeds from the authority of Christ in the institution of the office itself; for that which gives being unto anything gives it also its essential properties.”⁹⁸

Augustus H. Strong

“What is ordination? Ordination is the setting apart of a person divinely called to a work of special ministration in the church. It does not involve the communication of power,—it is simply a recognition of powers previously conferred by God, and a consequent formal authorization, on the part of the church, to exercise the gifts already bestowed. This recognition and authorization should not only be expressed by the vote in which the candidate is approved by the church or the council which represents it, but should also be accompanied by a special service of admonition, prayer, and the laying-on of hands (Acts 6:5, 6; 13:2, 3; 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22)....

Ordination recognizes him as set apart to the work of preaching and administering ordinances, in some particular church or in some designated field of labor, as representative of the church....

Cambridge Platform, 1648, chapter 9—“ordination is nothing else but the solemn putting of a man into his place and office in the church whereunto he had right before by election, being like

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 95-96, emphasis added. Thornwell and Miller differed as to whether or not ruling elders should take part in the ordination of ministers. The historic Presbyterian position is that ruling elders should not take part.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 98, emphasis added.

the installing of a Magistrate in the Commonwealth." Ordination confers no authority—it only recognizes authority already conferred by God...

The laying-on of hands is appointed to be the regular accompaniment of ordination, as baptism is appointed to be the regular accompaniment of regeneration; while yet the laying-on of hands is no more the substance of ordination, than baptism is the substance of regeneration."⁹⁹

Regardless of whether one believes that ordination is a bestowal of authority from the laying on of hands of the bishop (e.g., Episcopalianism), or a conferring of authority from the pope, or a conferring of authority directly from Jesus Christ officially and judicially recognized by the presbytery (e.g., Presbyterianism), the person ordained is said to receive *ministerial authority*. When the Puritans (i.e., Cambridge Platform) and Presbyterians say that ordination does *not* confer authority, they are stressing the fact that ministerial authority does not proceed from the church hierarchy or the people but directly from Christ.

Those who believe that women should be ordained deacons do not deny that "ordination is induction into an authoritative order"¹⁰⁰ they simply assert that the type of authority which pertains to the office of deacon does not involve "headship functions"¹⁰¹; therefore, the office of deacon is open to women. They argue "that the nature of the authority to be exercised in the particular office depends on the particular office...the authority of the deacon is not to be equated with the authority of the elder."¹⁰² The authors of the OPC Minority Report quote the Puritan theologian John Owen in support of their position: "This office of deacons is an office of service, which gives not any authority or power in the rule of the church; but being an office, it gives authority with respect unto the special work...."¹⁰³

While it is true that deacons are not pastors or ruling elders and do not vote with the session, they still have an ecclesiastical authority in the church that is clearly forbidden to women. The deacons are the financial officers of the church. The collection of tithes and the management of God's money is in itself an authoritative function forbidden to women. The collection of tithes and the management of church funds have always been restricted to men. In the old dispensation the Levites held this responsibility; in the synagogue, the *chazanim*; and in the Christian church, the deacon.

The Bible teaches that the husband is the head of the household and thus has the final say in how money is to be allocated. The wife can and should communicate her desires and concerns, but she must submit to her husband's financial decisions. The idea that women are permitted to control the financial affairs of the church when they are not permitted to have the final say regarding the financial affairs of the home is not logical. Is a woman deacon permitted to have

⁹⁹ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (1909), 3:918-919.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁰¹ OPC Minority Report, p. 953.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 953.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 954.

authority over her husband's money in the church, while submitting to his control of the finances in the home? Such a situation is unseemly. The fact that women can be and are the chief financial officers of major corporations is irrelevant. The issue is not one of fitness or ability but of God's ordained order of authority in the household and in the church.¹⁰⁴ The issue of authority and the management of church funds is one reason Calvin made a distinction between those who manage church funds and aid the poor, and those who do not manage church funds but only assist the poor. The first category Calvin restricted to men (i.e., the deacons), the second category included elderly women (i.e., the servant-widows who assist the deacons).

Another reason the office of deacon contains an authority forbidden to women is that helping the poor involves much more than writing a check or giving out a food basket. Often people are poor because of habitual sin patterns. Sometimes the deacon has the task to teach responsibility to those who are irresponsible. While it is true that the church session has the responsibility to handle cases of church discipline, that does not mean that deacons have no authority whatsoever. During the first forty to fifty years of the Reformation, deacons sat with the session and were involved in discipline and decision making.¹⁰⁵ While it is true that the deacons' responsibilities were narrowed considerably by the Second Reformation, we should be very careful not to narrow the office to the point of making ordination meaningless. When a

¹⁰⁴ "When, however, St. Paul declares that the man is the head of the woman, as Jesus Christ of the man, and that the covering is a sign of that subjection, then all dispute is laid low; unless once cares to contend with God, who is the author of these ranks and of the distinction that St. Paul makes here. So we see that the reason why St. Paul has gone about it this way was so that there would not be a lot of arguments and back talk; and so that if one cared to render obeisance to God, he would hold his peace. Since this is the way it is, we see that the order of nature is changed and perverted unless we govern ourselves as he indicates" (*Men, Women and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin*, trans. by Seth Skolnitsky [Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage, 1992], p. 15).

¹⁰⁵ . "Luther, in his *Address to the Nobility*, June 1520, said, 'He [the minister] should have as assistants several priests [the term *priest* continued to be used for a time] and *deacons* who should help him to *govern* the people and congregations with sermons and the administration of the sacraments.' The French Confession of 1559 also says: 'It [the true church] ought to be *governed* according to the policy which our Savior Jesus Christ has established, that is, that there be pastors, supervisors, and deacons.' Note that deacons form a part of the governing body. The Genevan *Ordinances* of 1541 state something similar: '...let the minister distribute the bread in good order and with reverence, and let no others give the cup except the ones appointed or the *deacons* with the ministers.' The *Ordinances* of 1576 make the same statement about the deacons. Again, what Calvin says about women who perform baptism is surely applicable to women who might act as deacons. In his *Tracts* he says: 'Even in the minutest matters, as meat and drink, whatever we attempt and dare with a doubtful conscience, Paul plainly denounces as sin. Now, in baptism by women, what certainty can there be, while a rule delivered by Christ is violated? For that office of the Gospel which he assigned to ministers, women seize for themselves.' Further, Calvin's reply to the Synod of Lyons in 1563 (compare Quick, *Syndicon* I, p. 53) says: '*Deacons* and elders, being the arms and hands of the Pastor...may also distribute [the bread and cup] to those who are remote from [the pastor].' In these passages the mention of deacons is noteworthy because there was a widespread disinclination to allow deacons and even elders to assist in the communion service. Calvin obviously regards deacons as having authority by virtue of the ordination. They are no doubt subordinate to the minister. Ordination confers on the minister the authority to preach the Word, and, since the sacraments require the Word, ordination confers the authority to administer the sacraments, and also, in conjunction with other ordained men, the authority of the keys. But though the deacons are subordinate to the minister, they participate in that authority. The ordination questions are the same; the minister receives the deacons as taking 'part of this office with us;' and the congregation promises obedience to the deacon" (Gordon Clark, "The Ordination of Women" in John Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* [Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985], p. 69-70).

deacon confronts a brother who is poor, who is neglecting his family responsibilities, he does so with the full authority of the diaconal office. When he confronts someone who refuses to tithe or care for his family or work, he does so with an authority that the non-ordained church member does not possess.

While it is true that the session (i.e., the elders) has the final say in judicial matters in the local church, there is still an authoritative-judicial aspect to the diaconal office. The deacons decide who receives church funds and who does not. In a first century setting (or even a modern inner city or third-world setting), if every important decision regarding the poor that had an authoritative-judicial aspect had to be referred to the elders, there would be little reason for even having deacons and there would be little reason for ordaining deacons. In our time when the secular humanistic "cradle to grave" welfare states are in crisis, the diaconal office will once again become crucial if churches are going to effectively reach and minister to the poor. All Christians have a biblical responsibility to help the poor. The deacons are the *leaders*, organizers, financial decision makers and ordained authoritative church officers whom God has appointed over this ministry. The wide scope and importance of the diaconal office was recognized in the mid-nineteenth century by the Covenanter J. M. Willson in his classic work, *The Deacon*:

The apostolic churches *felt*, as well as acknowledged, their obligations in reference to the care of the poor, particularly widows and orphans. To attend to this sacred duty they chose, and ordained deacons. Nor is it to be supposed, that their duty to the poor was limited to the mere furnishing them with pecuniary support. The high qualifications required in the deacons warrant us to infer that they have a wider range of duty. Moreover, pecuniary assistance is not that which is alone, or chiefly, needed by the objects of the Christian's charities. They need advice and encouragement. The young, especially orphans, require to be properly educated, and their steps governed by the hand of kindness and charity. For want of proper instruction and counsel, how many baptized children, whose parents have been removed from them by death, have been lost to the church, and to themselves! Here is a wide field to be occupied by the deacon; he must feed the poor, as the almoner of the church's bounty; and he must do more. He must give to the necessitous advice, and impart to them comfort; not as a spiritual guide, but as a kind friend, and particularly, as sustaining to the desolate and friendless orphan, a relation almost as intimate as the parental.¹⁰⁶

The fact that women-deacon advocates regard the office of deacon as non-authoritative and therefore open to women is based in part on the way orthodox Presbyterian directories for church government emphasize the differences between the office of elder and the office of deacon (this emphasis is necessary because many denominations have turned deacons into virtual ruling elders; e.g., various Baptist groups). For example, the Directory for Church Government of the RPCNA says that "the Diaconate...is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise, like the whole life of the church, is under the oversight of the session and its function is administrative....

¹⁰⁶ James M. Willson, *The Deacon*, pp. 22-23.

The board of deacons has no legislative or judicial powers; its work is wholly administrative, subject to the direction of the session and sensitive to the counsel of the congregation."¹⁰⁷

While it is certainly true that deacons are not the judicial body in the local church, and therefore do not have judicial powers, it is a mistake to assume that deacons have no authority at all.

When the Directory for Church Government says that "the diaconate is wholly administrative,"¹⁰⁸ it should be kept in mind that the word administer means "to have charge of, direct, manage." When the Directory says that the diaconate "is neither a ruling nor teaching office," it does not mean that deacons do not teach, counsel or exercise any authority within their sphere of duties. The RPCNA Directory for Church Government describes a number of diaconal duties that involve authority forbidden to women in the church: 1. Meeting jointly with the session for prayer, evaluation and growth in their respective ministries. 2. Serving as *consultative members in higher courts* of the church when appointed.¹⁰⁹ 3. *Leading* the congregation in discerning and ministering to needs such as: local needs of individuals and institutions, national and international needs. 4. *Gathering* and distribution of funds. 5. *Training* the congregation in the use of the members' gifts in the ministry of mercy. 6. Overseeing the work of treasurer. 7. Appointing a finance committee as needed. 8. Preparing an annual budget in conjunction with the session. 9. Offering *family budget counseling*. 10. *Teaching* principles of giving. 11. *Overseeing* the maintenance of property.¹¹⁰ While deacons are not the teachers or overseers of the congregation, their duties require meeting and *consulting* with the session and higher courts, "leading," "training," "overseeing," "appointing," "family counseling," "teaching," etc.

The obvious objection to what I have said above is that there is nothing wrong with Christian women offering Christian men counsel in private or teaching Christian men in private. Did not Priscilla teach Apollos, the great preacher? While there is nothing wrong with Christian women offering men counsel and advice, and there is nothing wrong with Christian women

¹⁰⁷ Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (1989), pp. D23-D24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. D24.

¹⁰⁹ As noted earlier, the deacon's authority of office was recognized by the early Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The first generation of Presbyterians permitted the deacons to attend session meetings and "assist in judgement [sic]." Although the deacons were consultive members and not voting members, their regular presence on the court and their freedom to speak are a recognition of their authority. "Men of best knowledge of God's Word and cleanest life were to be nominated annually for election as elders and deacons. The former were to assist the minister in all affairs of the kirk, to hold meetings with him for judging of causes, admonishing evil livers, yea, to take heed to the life, manners, diligence, and study of the ministers, as well as of the flock. The deacons were to assist in judgment, but chiefly to collect and distribute what was provided for the poor. They might also, as in the French Church, be admitted to read the Scriptures and common prayers in the congregation if required and qualified to do so" (Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Scottish Reformation: Its Epochs, Episodes, Leaders, and Distinctive Characteristics* [Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900], p. 52, emphasis added).

¹¹⁰ *The Constitution of the RPCNA*, pp. D24, D25. Number 2 is described under Privileges (p. D25). The Directory for Church Government cites Acts 6:3 as a proof text for diaconal standards of character and conduct (p. D24); therefore, the Directory officially recognizes Acts 6:1-3 as the institution of the diaconal office. It is interesting that while the RPCNA has opened the office of ordained deacon to women under 60 who are married, unmarried, or single, it has not attempted to water down the authoritative functions of the office in its description of duties and privileges. The statement that deacons are "under the oversight of the session" and function only administratively somehow makes these duties non-authoritative. Unless one accepts the idea of *non-authoritative authority*, the Directory suffers from an internal contradiction.

teaching men in private, deacons are publicly ordained authoritative church officers. A woman can meet privately with the session and offer advice, but she cannot be an *official consultative* member of a church court without having authority over men in the church. A woman can teach a man doctrine privately, but she cannot lead or train or teach the congregation without having authority over men in the church. When a Christian woman offers a Christian man advice or counsel in private, the man is not obligated to submit to her authority as a church officer.

Another objection is that "women deacons" are involved in non-authoritative teaching, non-authoritative leadership and non-authoritative counsel. This is totally arbitrary and irrational. There is no such thing in the church as non-authoritative teaching. This innovation was invented so that women could teach adult Sunday School and "lecture" and "speak" during the worship service.¹¹¹ People who invent such concepts as non-authoritative public teaching in church meetings are like the Pharisees who invented all sorts of clever arguments to make the word of God of no effect. The idea of non-authoritative teaching and non-authoritative leadership makes about as much sense as non-explosive explosives or non-authoritative authority. "How unseemly a thing it were, that one who is under subjection to one of the members, should preside over the entire body! It is therefore an argument from things inconsistent—If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently, prohibited from authority to teach in public."¹¹²

Another likely objection is that deacons do exercise authority but they do so outside of "public worship"; therefore, their authority is lawful. This objection is easily dispensed with by the simple fact that the ruling elders' authority is also primarily exercised outside of "public worship." Besides occasionally delivering a public prayer and assisting with the sacraments, virtually everything a ruling elder does is outside of the public church meetings. Thus, such an argument, if valid, would also open up the office of ruling elder to women. This is something virtually all the women-deacon advocates in the smaller orthodox Presbyterian bodies are rightly unwilling to do.

¹¹¹ "Paul's admonitions for women to keep silent, not to speak, and to be subject to men are expressed in the firmest terms. These admonitions are not mere suggestions. They are commands! The verbs 'keep silent' and 'be subject' are present imperatives in Greek. An imperative is a command, and the present tense conveys a continued action. The King James Version adds the words 'they are commanded.' to the text in order to accurately convey the meaning of the Greek imperative. What is the command? First, it is for women to keep silent in the church. It is obvious from verse 34 that the meaning of 'keeping silent' is explained by 'not permitted to speak.' God's Word [says] that women are commanded not to speak in the public assembly of the church. Second, women are commanded to subject themselves to male headship by keeping silent. As if the imperatives were not enough to stress the point, Paul uses the strongest of Greek negatives to emphasize his prohibition. One Greek word for 'not' is *ou*. We find these comments in *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* by Dana and Mantey concerning this negative particle: '*ou* is the particle used in summary negation. It is the stronger of the two negatives, and the proper negative for the statement of a downright fact. *Ou* denies the reality of an alleged fact. It is the clear-cut point-blank negative, objective, final' (p. 264). Paul emphatically stresses that women are not permitted to speak in church" (John M. Otis, *Counsel of Chalcedon*, Jan.-Feb. 1990, pp. 29-30.) The attempt to circumvent Paul's teaching 1 Cor. 14:34-35 by asserting that he was only prohibiting women from speaking during the evaluation of the prophets has been thoroughly refuted by John W. Robbins (*Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries*, pp. 1-20). While I would prefer that Robbins take a kinder, gentler approach in his polemic, he does faithfully represent the traditional Reformed understanding of this passage.

¹¹² John Calvin, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 468.

When we examine the deaconesses in the early church, the order of widows as taught by Calvin and practiced in Geneva, the servant-widows in the French Reformed churches and among some of the Puritan churches, we do not encounter the problem of women having authority over men in the church or speaking and teaching in the church. Why? Because these deaconesses or servant-widows were not in the same office as the male deacons. They were patterned after the order of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. The deaconess's or servant-widow's sphere of ministry and authority extended only to women. Handling the financial affairs of the church, teaching, counseling and rebuking men were things that only male deacons were permitted to do. Servant-widows or deaconesses baptized women (in the early church), counseled women, taught women, aided sick women, and so on. The only time servant-widows ministered to men was when, at the direction of the elders and deacons, they visited persecuted Christian men in prison and ministered to men in hospitals as nurses. As noted in the historical section of this book, the testimony of the church prior to the nineteenth century regarding deaconesses or servant-widows is unanimous.

The issue is *not* just whether or not the church should have deaconesses; the issue is whether the church is going to follow the biblical requirements for deaconesses. As long as women-deacon advocates reject Paul's order of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. in favor of placing women in the authoritative ordained office of deacon (which is clearly reserved for qualified men, Ac. 6:3), biblical deaconesses (i.e., servant-widows) will not be restored among Reformed churches.

If Reformed churches did restore the order of widows, should these widow-servants be ordained? If one defines ordination as the church's recognition and public setting apart of a widow who received authority from God for her particular sphere of ministry, then from a strictly logical standpoint there is no reason why these servant-widows should not be ordained. The servant-widows do not exercise any authority over men. Their ministry, which includes counseling and teaching, is directed to the women of the church. All the various problems noted above regarding women deacons in the same office as men deacons do not apply to the order of widows.

But when the issue of ordination of widows is considered from the angle of divine warrant or the regulative principle, there is simply no biblical evidence to justify the ordination of women to the office of deacon. *Every* example of anointing in the Old Testament and ordination in the New Testament involves men.

There are no less than eleven words in the Greek text of the New Testament, which our translators have rendered by the verb "ordain." Six of these are used of persons being put into a position, such as office of some kind. The first, only applied to Christ, and signifying *to mark off, separate or set apart*, is twice used (Acts 10:42 and 17:3). The second signifying *to make*, and the third *to place*, and the fourth *to become*, are the words used for setting apart the apostles, (Mark 3:14; John 15:16; Acts 1:22 and 1 Tim. 2:7). The fifth *to place in position*, is

used of priests (Heb. 5:1 and 8:3) and of elders (Tit. 1:5). The sixth *to elect by raising the hand*, is used of elders (Acts 14:23).¹¹³

The closest thing to ordination of women which one can find in the Bible is Paul's reference to qualified widows being placed on a list (*katalego*). This being "taken into the number" indicates public honor and recognition. While in certain respects this "enrollment" resembles ordination (because the widows found qualified are set apart), it by itself is a weak inference for women's ordination.

The evidence from church history does not favor the ordination of women. There is no evidence of women being ordained until around A.D. 300-350. The ordination of deaconesses in the early church lasted for a few centuries and then was abolished. Calvin, Rutherford and other distinguished early Reformed theologians who believed in an order of widows did not believe that they should be ordained. "The believing Jews before the coming of Christ, as well as the unbelieving Jews afterward, had no woman as priests. Neither does Romanism. Neither does Lutheranism. Among these groups there are differences regarding the nature of ordination, its validity, its authority, and more; but all agree that it is wrong to ordain women. Now, where Rabbis Eliezer and Agiba; Popes Leo and Gregory; and Luther, Calvin and Knox agree on a particular point, it requires overwhelming argument to prove them wrong. On what basis could anyone construct such an argument? There is only one such basis, the Bible."¹¹⁴

While we do not need overwhelming proof, we do need at least justifiable inference.¹¹⁵ This position is supported by Paul's salutation to the church at Philippi. If deaconesses or servant-widows were ordained church officers, would they not be included in Paul's greeting to church officers? James Bannerman concurs:

It is hardly possible to conceive, that if there had been any other office-bearers besides bishops and deacons in the Church at Philippi, they would have been omitted in the apostolic

¹¹³ "Women and the Deacon's Office," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* XXVI-11 (Nov. 1888), p. 391.

¹¹⁴ Gordon Clark, "The Ordination of Women," in John Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), pp. 70-71.

¹¹⁵ Those who believe that women should be deacons in the same office as men deacons argue that Rom. 16:1 and 1 Tim. 3:11 prove that women should be deacons; therefore, they should be ordained to the diaconal office. I have shown in my sections dealing with Rom. 16:1 and 1 Tim. 3:11 that such argumentation is fallacious. The 1 Tim. 3:11 passage definitely does not refer to women deacons and is actually a good proof text against the "women in the same office as men deacons" view. Rom. 16:1 probably refers to the order of widows mentioned by Paul in 1 Tim. 5:9ff. As noted in the section on Rom. 16:1, given the indicators within the text, the broader context and the testimony of church history, the interpretation that Phoebe was a deacon in the same office as men deacons is very unlikely. The "Phoebe in the same office as men deacons" view is the worst interpretation of the three views considered. It is interesting to note that B. B. Warfield, who definitely favored the ordination of women into the diaconal office, knew that the PCUSA General Assembly would not ordain women in his day (i.e., the 1890s). Warfield and the committee he led, which favored women deacons, recommended that women deacons be set apart by prayer and not by ordination (PCUSA Minutes, 1890, p. 121). Given what we know regarding Warfield's view of women deacons, I believe that the committee's recommendation not to ordain women as deacons was a tactical move designed to get their main objective—women deacons—through the General Assembly. If they could get the PCUSA General Assembly to accept women deacons in the same office as male deacons, then they knew that ordination would eventually follow. Fortunately for the OPC and PCA, the committee's view was never adopted.

salutation; and it is just as difficult to conceive that the Church at Philippi, the first fruits of Paul's labours in Europe, over whose spiritual prosperity he so often rejoices, was destitute of any class of office-bearers necessary for or usual in other Churches. The conclusion seems to be irresistible, that the bishop and the deacon were the only office-bearers of an ordinary and permanent kind known in the apostolic Church.¹¹⁶

Another reason that servant-widows were not included in Paul's salutation is the fact that their ministry extended primarily to the women of the church. Since servant-widows (deaconesses) only had authority over women, and since they served as auxiliary helpers to the deacons, they could not be included in a list of office bearers over the whole church, both men and women. Servant-widows were not ordained office-bearers. But since their qualifications in Scripture mirror many of the elders' and deacons' qualifications, theologians such as Gillespie and Rutherford do speak of them as having an unordained office (Gillespie) or charge (Rutherford). Given the biblical and historical evidence, the church should not ordain servant-widows.

Conclusion

Given the biblical and historical evidence regarding women deacons, the question asked in the modern debate needs to be changed. The question has been: should the church have deaconesses? The question should be: what type of deaconesses does the New Testament authorize? When those in favor of women deacons ignore or misinterpret 1 Timothy 5:9ff. and 1 Timothy 3:11, and therefore argue that deaconesses should be ordained and serve in the same office with the same qualification as men deacons, they must be opposed on scriptural grounds. Why? Because there is not a shred of biblical or historical evidence to support the contention that women served in the same office as men deacons. Those who argue that God has *not* set aside a special "charge" in the church for godly widows must also be opposed on scriptural grounds. The New Testament gives clear qualifications for servant-widows (i.e., deaconesses) in 1 Timothy 5:9ff. and 1 Timothy 3:11. While the New Testament deaconess is a separate office from the male diaconate (with separate qualifications and a different ministry), the office clearly has divine authorization. The simple fact is that having deaconesses in the church is biblical as long as the church defines deaconesses biblically.

It is not enough simply to oppose the "women in the same office as men deacons" view of deaconesses. Churches must study and then put in place the servant-widows that do have divine authorization. Under divine inspiration Paul gives instructions to place godly widows on a list. These servant-widows or deaconesses are needed now just as much as they were in the early church. With the fragmentation of families, single mothers, and the separation of young families from relatives by hundreds and thousands of miles, young women need the support that only servant-widows have to offer.

¹¹⁶ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, [1869] 1974), 2:297.

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[HOME PAGE](#)