



SR Stance on Deacons and Deaconesses

At Solid Rock, we acknowledge that there is Biblical latitude surrounding the topic of *deacons*. While the office of deacon is indisputably Biblical, the Bible leaves room for variant views in practical function and role identity within the church. The role of the deacon appears to emerge in the church in Jerusalem as a response to the Apostles' growing workload that resulted from the growth explosion in the early church. The Greek word *diakonos* translates into English as *servant, attendant, minister, or deacon*. In Acts 6, the word for "deacon" doesn't appear but, in a very practical sense, the Apostles appoint seven spiritually mature men to *serve* as ministry assistants, freeing the Apostles to continue their primary ministry responsibilities of teaching and prayer. Unlike the role of elders, the role of deacon seems to be an as-needed role in the church, based on the size of the church and the ministry workload. For example, Paul doesn't mention the role of deacon to Titus for the churches in Crete, but he lists the role of deacon as a recognized office in the church in his first letter to Timothy. Presumably, there was a need for deacons in the Ephesus church where Timothy was pastoring, but the smaller churches in the towns of Crete didn't necessitate the ministry assistant role of deacon at the time Paul wrote to Titus.

The Greek word *diakonos* can translate into English in a formal sense as an official title of "deacon" or informally as the words "servant", "attendant" or "minister." In a literal sense, it means "one who executes the commands of another". The word *diakonos* is used 30 times in the New Testament. The ESV translates the word *diakonos* informally to "servant" (17 X), "attendant" (1 X), "minister" (7 X), and formally to "deacon" (5X). In most cases, the word is used simply to describe the nature of a person's heart as a ministry assistant or servant. However, in 1 Timothy 3 and the introduction to Philippians, Paul uses *diakonos* to signify a title given acknowledging a specific group of believers in the local church. At Solid Rock, we believe that the formal use of deacon signifies an as-needed office in the church, where spiritually-mature (Biblically-qualified) believers are set apart to serve as ministry assistants under the leadership of the elders in the local church.



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As it relates to gender, the New Testament leaves room for individual church interpretation. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul addresses the qualifications of deacons (masculine-plural) and their wives (feminine-plural). The Greek word *gunaikos*, translated as “wives” in most English translations, could also be translated “women.” In the immediate context of verses 8-13, it makes logical sense to translate the word as “wives.” However, in a broader context of Chapter 3, if Paul intended for the qualifications to be for deacons and their wives, why didn’t he do the same for the elders? Clearly, both elders and deacons are expected to have wives and families. So why would only the deacon’s wives need to meet certain qualifications and not the wives of the elders? One possibility is that Paul is thinking of only men serving as elders, but he is also including women in his expectations for those who serve as deacons. In addition to this passage, Paul refers to Phoebe in Romans 16 as a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae. With the various uses of the word, *diakonos*, it’s hard to pinpoint Paul’s full intention just by translating the word from Greek to English. Did Paul mean to call Phoebe a deaconess in the formal sense or was he simply calling her a faithful servant in the church? The context of Romans 16 offers some evidence to help understand Paul’s meaning. In the next verse (Romans 16:2), he refers to Phoebe as a ***prostatis***. This Greek word translates into English as a female leader, guardian or patroness. In the broader context of Romans 16, it seems as if Paul is using the title of deaconess in a formal sense, referring to Phoebe’s position in the church. While this is one possible conclusion, there is not an obvious clarity to Paul’s intentions in Romans 16 or in 1 Timothy 3. This places the responsibility on individuals and the church to interpret the scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit. The primary difference between interpretations regarding gender seems to be whether or not you translate the Greek wording in view of the word by itself, or the broader context of the passage. At Solid Rock, the elders believe that it is both appropriate and edifying for the church to allow women to serve as deacons. There are 2 reasons for our stance: 1) the word for deacon translates most accurately as “servant” and there are many examples of women serving Jesus and the church in ministry and 2) the contexts in which the word is used seems to



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indicate a plausible case for women to serve in the church, fulfilling the role of deaconess.

At Solid Rock, we strive to land firmly where the Bible lands firmly and land softly where the Bible lands softly. In other words, in topics of theology or ecclesiology where the Bible isn't emphatically clear, we hold our stances loosely; always ready to submit our position to a clearer understanding of scripture. However, in areas of theology and ecclesiology where the Bible is extremely direct and clear, we hold our stances firmly but never above the authority of scripture or beyond review. Therefore, the elders acknowledge that our interpretation of the role of deacons and deaconesses is a soft position. However, because this stance impacts the practical function of church members serving in ministry, we believe it is helpful to have a stance that best represents our interpretation of the scriptures. The Solid Rock elders do not consider the topic of deacons as a primary topic of theology or ecclesiology, and therefore the elders don't require that Solid Rock members hold this view in order to have a unity of faith with the church. It is our policy to avoid division over tertiary issues, such as the interpretation of deacons, in order to maintain the unity we have in Christ and pursue our main task of making disciples for Jesus for the glory of God.

1. **Matthew 20:26** It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,
2. **Matthew 22:13** Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'
3. **Matthew 23:11** The greatest among you shall be your servant.
4. **Mark 9:35** And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."



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5. **Mark 10:43** But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,
6. **John 2:5** His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”
7. **John 2:9** When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom
8. **John 12:26** If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.
9. **Romans 13:4** for she is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.
10. **Romans 15:8** For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,
11. **Romans 16:1-2** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, 2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.
- 12.1 **Corinthians 3:5** What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.
- 13.2 **Corinthians 3:6** who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.



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- 14.2 **Corinthians 6:4** but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,
- 15.2 **Corinthians 11:15** So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.
- 16.2 **Corinthians 11:23** Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.
17. **Galatians 2:17** But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!
18. **Ephesians 3:7** Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.
19. **Ephesians 6:21** So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.
20. **Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:
21. **Colossians 1:7** just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant (word for *bondservant*, not *deacon*). He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf
22. **Colossians 1:23** if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.



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23. **Colossians 1:25** of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,
24. **Colossians 4:7** Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant (word for *bondservant*, not *deacon*) in the Lord.
25. **1Timothy 3:8** ⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
26. **1Timothy 4:6** If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.