

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me – Galatians 2:20

PERTINENT GREEK TERMS:

λειτουργία (pronounced *leitourgía*) – This is one of the words that can be translated by our term ‘ministry.’ It is found in Hebrews 8:6 and 9:21. The primary meaning of *leitourgía* is ‘public ministry.’ It is from this word that the term ‘liturgy’ is derived.

διάκονος (pronounced *diákonos*) – This word means ‘servant.’ It is a compound word made up of the Greek term **κόνις** (pronounced *kónis* – ‘dust’) plus the preposition **διά** (pronounced *día* – ‘by’ or ‘through’). The most basic translation is ‘*through the dust*.’ The noun, **διακονία** (pronounced *diakonía*), a derivative, is used of general service to the church. See below for a detailed word study of *diakonos*. (English Derivative: ‘Deacon’).

ἐπισκοπός (pronounced *episkopós*) – This word is translated ‘Pastor’ in Titus 1:7. It is the same word translated ‘Elder’ in 1 Timothy 3, and it carries the meaning, ‘overseer.’

οἰκονομία / οἰκονόμος (pronounced *oikonomía / oikonómos*) – *oikonomía* means ‘stewardship,’ while *oikonómos* means ‘steward’ (Titus 1:7) – Both are compound words from the Greek term **οἶκος** (pronounced *oikos* – ‘house’) plus **νόμος** (pronounced *nómos* – ‘law’ or ‘rule’). It is translated ‘stewardship’ in Colossians 1:25.

ὑπηρέτης (pronounced *huperétēs*) – This word is translated ‘servant’ in 1 Corinthians 4:1 but it means ‘under-rower.’ An ‘under-rower’ was a slave who was stationed at the very bottom of a ship that had three rows of oarsmen, all stationed below-deck, and it was *this bottom row* that was manned by the ‘under-rowers.’

σύνδουλος (pronounced *súndoûlos*) – This is a compound word made up of the Greek term **δοῦλος** (pronounced *doûlos* – ‘slave’) plus **σύν** (pronounced *soon* – ‘with’) – This word means ‘fellow bond-servant.’ The emphasis of both terms (*doûlos* and *súndoûlos*) is ‘submission.’

Πάθημα (pronounced *páthema*) – This word usually refers to ‘external suffering.’ **THAYER’S GREEK LEXICON** refers to its use in **COLOSSIANS 1:24** as, “the afflictions Christians must undergo on behalf of the same cause for which **CHRIST** endured His afflictions.”

ἀνταναπληρώω (pronounced *antanaplērōō*) – This term is built off of the Greek root **πληρώω** (pronounced *plērōō* – ‘to complete’) – It is used in that exact sense in Colossians 1:24.

ὕστέρημα (pronounced *hustérēma*) – This word means ‘deficiency’ and it appears in Colossians 1:24.

θλίψις (pronounced *thlipsis*) – This word means ‘affliction.’ It is important to note that this word never is used in the Bible to refer to suffering associated with the Atonement.

μυστήριον (pronounced *mustērion*) – This word is translated ‘mystery’ in numerous biblical texts.

I. THE MYSTERY OF ISRAEL’S APOSTASY (Romans 11:25) – “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — (then he defines the mystery) that a partial hardening has happened to **ISRAEL** until **THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES** has come in.”

Notice, the hardening of **THE JEWISH PEOPLE** is **PARTIAL**. **JEW**s were the *first* to come to faith in **CHRIST** in the early church, and **JEW**s are coming to faith individually every day. However, the national salvation of **ISRAEL** awaits the fulfillment of what **PAUL** calls the completion of '**THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES**.' (**BUT LEST YOU THINK THE CHURCH IS EXEMPT FROM 'FALLING AWAY' ... THERE ALSO IS ...**)

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE UPCOMING APOSTASY WITHIN THE CHURCH (2 Thessalonians 2:7) – “For the *mystery* of lawlessness is already at work; only *He* who now restrains will do so until *He* is taken out of the way.”

The first example — *The Mystery of Israel’s Apostasy* — references ‘until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.’ This ‘Gentile period’ ends with **THE RAPTURE**. And notice in this second example, which refers to apostasy within the church — there is the implication that apostasy exists today and it will be on the increase throughout the Church Age. What prevents it from its full expression is something (*or better, someone*) called ‘**HE.**’ **THE HOLY SPIRIT** is restraining the full expression of this apostasy ... and **He** will continue to restrain it ... until **He** is taken out of the way at **THE RAPTURE**.

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE UNITY OF JEW AND GENTILE IN CHRIST (Ephesians 3:3-6) – “By revelation there was revealed to me the *mystery*, as I wrote before in brief ... which in other generations was *not made known* to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

The mystery is the bringing together two disparate groups – **JEW**s and **GENTILES** – and forming one unified new body, **THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**.

IV. THE MYSTERY OF THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH (1 Corinthians 15:51-53) – “Behold, I tell you a *mystery*: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed.”

This is a mystery that could not have been revealed prior to the formation of **THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**.

V. THE MYSTERY THAT NOT EVERY PERSON WILL DIE (1 Corinthians 15:51^A) – “Behold, I tell you a *mystery*: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” But the author of Hebrews wrote: “It is appointed unto man once to die once, then the judgment” – Hebrews 9:27. This has been – and is – almost exclusively the case ... but there is a *mystery* related to this that reveals all men will not die; some will be transformed from mortal bodies into immortal bodies at **THE RAPTURE**.

So as you can see, a *mystery* covers a lot of ground; but what is consistent in all these examples is: **A MYSTERY is ‘a divine truth that heretofore has been hidden, but now is revealed.’**

So what is the *mystery* of **COLOSSIANS 1:25-27** – **WHAT IS THE MYSTERY HIDDEN FROM PAST GENERATIONS?** It is ...

VI. THE MYSTERY OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT OF CHRIST – CHRIST IN YOU (Colossians 1:26-27) – This is the point of our Opening Scripture: “I have been crucified *with* Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but *Christ lives in me*; and the life *I now live* in the flesh *I live by faith in the Son of God*, who loved me and gave Himself up *for me*” – Galatians 2:20.

“By revelation there was revealed to me the *mystery*, as I wrote before in brief ... which in other generations was *not made known* to the sons of men, as it has *now been revealed* to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” – Ephesians 3:3-6.

Comments Regarding the Term *διάκονος* (*diákonos*): DEACON

OCCURRENCES OF THE GREEK NOUN *διάκονος* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: This term can mean ‘an official office within the local church’ or it can be ‘a general term for service.’ The occurrence of a ***-symbol** below will indicate the use of the term as an official Office, while the occurrence of a #**-symbol** will indicate the general use of *diákonos* to denote general service. The occurrence of a ?**-symbol** will indicate the interpretation is ‘less clear.’ **Bold type** = correspondence of terms (*Greek and English*).

διάκονος (*diákonos*) – **Servant, Deacon** (This term [and its derivative *diakonia*] occurs 30-times in the New Testament in 28-separate-verses)

- #Matthew 20:26 ἐν ὑμῖν μέγας γενέσθαι ἐσται ὑμῶν **διάκονος**
whoever desires to be great among you shall be your **servant**
- #Matthew 22:13 βασιλεὺς εἶπεν τοῖς **διακόνοις** Δήσαντες αὐτοῦ πόδας
the king said to the **servants** ... bind him by the foot ...
- #Matthew 23:11 ὁ δὲ μείζων ὑμῶν ἐσται ὑμῶν **διάκονος**
but the greatest among you shall be your **servant**
- #Mark 9:35 εἴ τις θέλει πρῶτος εἶναι, ἔσται πάντων ἔσχατος καὶ πάντων **διάκονος**
if anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and **servant** of all
- #Mark 10:43 ἀλλ’ ὃς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται ὑμῶν **διάκονος**
but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your **servant**
- #John 2:5 λέγει ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ τοῖς **διακόνοις**: ὅ τι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν ποιήσατε.
his mother was saying to the **servants**, whatever he says to you, do it
- #John 2:9 ἐστίν, οἱ δὲ **διάκονοι** ἤδεισαν οἱ ἠντληκότες
but the **servants** who had drawn the water knew
- #John 12:26 εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ **διάκονος** ὁ ἐμὸς ἔσται· ἐάν τις ἐμοὶ **διακονῇ** τιμήσει αὐτὸν ὁ πατήρ
where I am, there my **servant** will be also; if anyone **serves** me, the father will honor him
(here the noun *διάκονος* and the verb *διακονῇ* appear together in the same sentence)
- #Romans 13:4^A θεοῦ γὰρ **διάκονός** ἐστίν σοι εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν
for it (*human government*) is a **minister** of God to you for good
- #Romans 13:4^B γὰρ **διάκονός** ἐστίν ἕκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι
for it (*human government*) is a **minister**, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who practices evil
- #Romans 15:8 λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν **διάκονον** γεγενῆσθαι ...
for I say that Christ has become a **servant** ...
- ?Romans 16:1 Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὗσαν [καὶ] **διάκονον** τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς
I commend to you our sister Phoebe who is a **servant** of the church which is at Cenchrea
- #1 Cor 3:5 Τί οὖν ἐστίν Ἀπολλῶς; τί δὲ ἐστίν Παῦλος; **διάκονοι** δι’ ὧν ἐπιστεύσατε
who then is Apollōs? who then is Paul? **Servants** through whom you believed (*note: neither Apollōs nor Paul held the office of deacon*)
- #2 Cor 3:6 ὃς καὶ ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς **διακόνους** καινῆς διαθήκης
who also made us adequate **servants** of a new covenant
- #2 Cor 6:3 μηδεμίαν ἐν μηδενὶ διδόντες προσκοπὴν, ἵνα μὴ μωμηθῇ ἡ **διακονία**

giving no cause for offense in anything so that the **ministry** will not be discredited. (*Here the noun is diakonia, a derivative of diakonos that refers to the ministry itself and not the minister himself.*)

- #2 Cor 6:4 ἀλλ' ἐν παντί συνιστάντες ἑαυτοὺς ὡς θεοῦ **διάκονοι**
but in all things, commending ourselves as **servants** of God (*here Paul includes himself in a group designated by the term διάκονος ... but Paul never held the office of deacon*)
- #2 Cor 11:15 οὐ μέγα οὖν εἶ καὶ οἱ **διάκονοι** αὐτοῦ μετασχηματίζονται ὡς **διάκονοι** δικαιοσύνης
therefore it is not surprising if his **servants** also disguise themselves as **servants** of righteousness (*here Satan's false teachers disguise themselves as servants (deacons) of righteousness – certainly not deacons in the church*)
- #2 Cor 11:23 **διάκονοι** Χριστοῦ εἰσιν
are they **servants** of Christ?
- #Galatians 2:17 ἄρα Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας **διάκονος**; μὴ γένοιτο
is Christ then a **minister** of sin?
- #Ephesians 3:7^A διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, οὗ ἐγενήθην **διάκονος**
through the gospel of which I was made a **minister** (*here again the term διάκονος is used of Paul ... but Paul never held the office of deacon*)
- ?Ephesians 6:21 Τύχικος ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς **διάκονος** ἐν κυρίῳ ...
Tychicus, the beloved brother and **minister** in the Lord ... (*this could be the office or general service to the church*)
- *Philippians 1:1 Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δούλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ **διακόνους** ...
Paul and Timothy, servants (*slaves ... doulos*) of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are in Philippi, with all the Elders and **Deacons** ... (*other than the list of requirements for Elders and Deacons listed by Paul in his letter to Timothy, this is the only other clear-cut occurrence in the New Testament where Paul refers to Deacons as an official title or office.*)
- #Colossians 1:7 Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν **διάκονος** τοῦ Χριστοῦ ...
Ephraim, our beloved fellow servant who is a faithful **servant** of Christ on our behalf ...
- #Colossians 1:23 οὐρανόν, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος **διάκονος**
of which (*gospel*) I Paul was made a **minister** (*here the term diakonos is used of Paul ... by Paul himself ... and Paul never held the office of deacon*)
- #Colossians 1:25 ἧς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ **διάκονος** ...
of this church I was made a **minister** (*here the context is set in Colossians 1:24: “on behalf of His Body which is the church” ... the context is the Body of Christ, not the local church. Paul was a minister of the Body of Christ but **not** ‘a deacon’ in a local church ... so once again, here diakonos does not refer to the office but to functional service.*)
- ?Colossians 4:7 Τύχικος ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς **διάκονος** ...
Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful **servant** ... (*as per Ephesians 6:21*)
- #1 Thess 3:2 καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ **διάκονον** τοῦ θεοῦ
and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's **fellow-worker** (*Here diakonos is translated ‘fellow-worker’*)
- *1 Timothy 3:8 **Διακόνους** ὡσαύτως σεμνοὺς ...

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity ... (here follows in verses 8-13, the requirements for serving in **the official office of deacon** ... the requirements are similar to the requirements laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 for “Overseers [Elders]. In both cases, “husband of one wife” is listed as a requirement ... and **this requirement limits the office holders to men**. The mention of ‘women¹’ in verse 11 ... in combination with the repeated adverb ‘likewise’ [used in verses 8 and 11] is **insufficient** to argue that the adverb links women to the Office of Deacon, which obviously is the context of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Far more likely, it means that **to the degree the man holding the office must be of high integrity, so also must his wife**. Note: the Greek word for woman and wife is the same word.)

*1 Timothy 3:12 Διάκονοι ἐστῶσαν μιᾷς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες ...

Deacons must be the husbands of one wife ...

*1 Timothy 4:6 Ταῦτα ὑποτιθέμενος τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς καλὸς ἔση διάκονος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ ...

In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good **servant** of Christ ...

Of the thirty occurrences of the term in the New Testament, four clearly refer to the official office of deacon (*Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 3:12, 4:6*), three are less clear (*Romans 16:1, Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7*), and **twenty-three occurrences refer to general service to the local church or to the Body of Christ**.

Also worth noting is the occurrence of the VERB διακονέω (pronounced *diakonéo*), which quite obviously is related to the noun *διάκονος* (*diákonos*) discussed above, occurs in Mark 10:45, where **Jesus refers to Himself as ‘the one who serves,’** in effect saying, **‘I am the one serving as a deacon,’ i.e., ‘as a servant.’** The point of this should be obvious: this use of the verb *diakonéo* is yet another example of the term *διάκονος* – **and terms within its semantic range (e.g., *diakonía*) being used throughout the New Testament in a way that definitively does not refer to the office of deacon**. In fact, **διάκονος RARELY is used in reference to the official office of deacon**, most often simply meaning, **‘one who serves.’**

THE DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND ACTS 6:1-6:

All authority originates with God, who delegates authority according to His own good pleasure. In Genesis a principle is established that still is in effect today, *viz.*, the man was set over the woman, **not ontologically nor** in any way as her superior in the sense of *the Imago Dei*, **nor** in his or her inherent value as a human being, but **distinctions regarding role and function are linked to the order of creation and therefore are not derived from culture²**. The delegation of authority in the home and in the church can be depicted as follows:

GOD’S DESIGN FOR DELEGATED AUTHORITY

(IN THE FAMILY)

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

FATHER (*Husband*)

MOTHER (*Wife*)

(*And of course PARENTS*)

SON / DAUGHTER (*Children*)

(IN THE CHURCH)

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

JESUS CHRIST

ELDERS

DEACONS

CONGREGANTS

The office of deacon is established in Acts 6:1-6. The issue, called **‘serving tables’** in Acts 6:2 probably had nothing to do with serving food, but referred to managing the distribution of money

¹ The Greek term translated ‘women’ is *γυνή* ... This is the normal term used to refer to a wife. The sentence can (and probably should) be translated, “And as for their wives, they likewise must be dignified”

² See 1 Timothy 2:11-14

in the form of support for older widows, who were unlikely to remarry due to age considerations, and who needed assistance ... assistance that was appropriately provided by the church³.

The specific *verb* used in Acts 6, translated 'to serve' is *διακονέω* (*diakoneo*) – All occurrences of this verb are not included above in the list of occurrences of the noun *διάκονος*, but *διάκονος* quite obviously is derived from it.

- As is obvious from a cursory glance at the list of occurrences, *διάκονος* does not always refer to the office of deacon; in fact, most of the occurrences simply mean, 'to provide a service' or 'to serve.'
- Therefore, we would be in error to assume every occurrence of this common Greek term is a reference to an official office.
 - In fact, of the occurrences listed above from Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, on two occasions (*Colossians 1:23 and 1:25*) Paul refers to himself as a diakonos – but Paul never held the official office.
 - And in Matthew 20:26; 22:13; John 2:5, and Romans 13:4, the term simply means 'servant' – and nothing more.
 - In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Ephesians 3:7, and Colossians 1:25, the term *διάκονος* clearly means 'minister.'

How do we understand the Acts Six passage? (1) *Is it a pattern for church leadership that is to be followed throughout the Church Age?* (2) *Is it optional?* (3) *Was it incidental to the situation and needs of the specific Church in Jerusalem?* Or finally, (4) *is it possible the answer lies in a combination of the three stated possibilities?*

What seems clear is the Apostles (*and by extension ... Elders*) viewed their primary responsibility to be the study and transmission of the Word of God in clear language that was doctrinally sound – and the practical issues with the widows was distracting them from their primary role. The solution was to delegate to a group of men the responsibilities associated with the day-to-day, practical tasks that were distracting the Apostles, and **to give those men – the deacons – authority** to address these day-to-day, practical needs of the church.

There is little doubt Paul's statement in Philippians 1:1 outlines *a binary division of leadership* in the Philippian Church: (1) *Elders*, and (2) *Deacons*.

In 1 Timothy Chapter Three, Paul addresses this binary division of labor, so we can conclude from this that Elders and Deacons also were assumed to be part of the leadership of the Ephesian Church, just as they were in Jerusalem.

W.W. Knight III concludes: "*These three passages (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 3:8-13) show a twofold division of labor in early, middle, and later time periods in the New Testament Church, in key cities in three various geographical areas (Palestine, Greece, and Asia Minor), both in Jewish and in Greco-Roman settings*⁴."

ETYMOLOGY OF THE GREEK TERM *διάκονος* (diakonos) IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

³ It is important to note that this assistance was designated for widows who were members of the church; it was not the responsibility of the church to address the broader economic issues of the entire city of Jerusalem.

⁴ G.W. Wright III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New International Greek New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) pg. 175.

Alexander Buttmann traces the origin of the term *diakonos* to a now obsolete term⁵ that carried the meaning: *'one who executes the commands of another.'* When used of the official Office of Deacon (*Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13*), the term seems to refer to those with *the delegated authority* to distribute the money collected from the congregants of the church.

The question before us in the 21st Century has to do with whether the Scriptures approve of women serving in the role of Deaconess – as an official title – OR IN ANY CAPACITY IN WHICH AUTHORITY OVER MEN IS INHERENTLY EXERCISED (*this includes teaching adult men*) – and as such, *possessing the delegated authority* to serve alongside men in the role of ELDER, DEACON, or TEACHER (*of adult men*).

The single verse in the Bible that is used to justify electing women to the official office of deaconess is Romans 16:1: *Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὗσαν [καὶ] **διάκονον** τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς* **TRANSLATION: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church at Cenchrea.**

As a thought exercise, in light of the fact that only one verse in the Bible – viz., Philippians 1:1 – (*outside of the verses in 1 Timothy that lay out the requirements for becoming an Elder – 1 Timothy 3:1-7 – and a Deacon – 1 Timothy 3:8-13*) – clearly refers to a deacon in the sense of an office-holder – while twenty-three other verses ... with a high degree of probability, simply refer to believers (*both men and women*) serving the Lord in the context of the congregation – why would we single out Romans 16:1 and claim from *one relatively obscure reference to the noun διάκονος* that is written with a Greek feminine ending (*since it refers to Phoebe, a woman*) ... why would we seek to establish *from this sparsity of evidence* the clear conclusion that women are intended to hold the office of deacon, a position that is contrary to the Scriptures, and by its very nature, requires said office-holder to exercise authority over men? – something forbidden by Scripture.

Paul twice referred to himself by the term *διάκονος* (*Colossians 1:23 and 1:25*), *and neither time did he intend to communicate that he held the Office of Deacon* (*which he did not*) – yet by the one reference to Phoebe, some seem compelled to draw that conclusion about her.

Mark Bailey, former President of Dallas Theological Seminary, concludes in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*⁶, *"The reference to Phoebe and Paul as 'servants' (in Romans 16:1 and in Colossians 1:23), probably relate more to function than to office."*

Then Bailey writes: *"For a certain group of women, 1 Timothy 3:11 interjects a list of qualifications almost identical to those of deacons. Some writers interpret 'women' (γυνή – gyné) as a reference to the office of deaconess, whereas others say it refers to deacons' wives. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul uses this noun both for women (1 Timothy 2:9, 12 & 14) and for wives (1 Timothy 3:2, 12 & 5:9 (see also Titus 1:6). The fact that in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 10 the word γυνή (gyné) refers to the wives of the elders and deacons respectively, seems to argue for that option as the best interpretation for verse 11. Furthermore, the qualifications of these women are treated separately from the men who serve as deacons. This would argue against seeing them as identical in role. Discussing them along with the deacons, however, suggests the women did serve in some capacity."*

This notwithstanding, jumping from the function of 'general service' to 'the official Office of Deacon,' seems unwarranted on the basis of one obscure reference in Romans 16:1. Paul had plenty of opportunities to resolve this question if he had considered it a possible consideration for the future – but he did not. Jesus also had the opportunity to choose females as disciples, but

⁵ The archaic term is *διάκω* (pronounced *diákō*).

⁶ Mark Bailey, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Moody Press), pgs. 364-65.

He did not – all twelve were men. And when the Apostles were appointed, they all were men. **Should we not expect at least one tangible example in the New Testament if we are supposed to place women in roles of authority over men in the church?** But in every case, when Paul discusses the delegation of authority in the home and in the church, **he links his conclusions to the order of creation and not to cultural norms.**

A principle we should employ, but far too often ignore, is this: *“Either the Scriptures will dictate how we address our culture, or our culture will dictate how we address the Scriptures.”* *It is all about the starting point* – and it seems clear the debate about female deaconesses begins with the culture and then imposes cultural expectations on the clear language of the Scriptures.

This is understandable ... women serve as CEO’S of companies, airline pilots, astronauts, and a variety of other significant roles in society ... so it should be said emphatically that **the issue of delegated authority does not rest on an assumption that men can perform the duties better than women.** In many cases, I dare to say, **women are more capable and probably would do a better job than men.** One of the best Bible teachers I had in college was Dr. Strickland, a female professor at Oklahoma Baptist University. But OBU is not a church.

I must re-emphasize, when Paul addresses the question of male / female authority, he links it to the order of creation, and in so doing, takes away any possibility of reinterpreting what Scripture teaches as being solely the product of the culture of Paul’s day.

It seems clear then that though *this does not establish some sort of totalitarian authority of men over women, which is subject to abuse*, the offices of Elder and Deacon are to be occupied by men, and the single verse (*Romans 16:1*) should be understood to mean Phoebe served the church faithfully, as do many women in our church, but she did not hold the official Office of Deacon.

IN CONCLUSION

All authority begins and ends with God ... no created being (*male or female*) possesses innate authority; **AND ALL AUTHORITY IS DELEGATED AUTHORITY** – and it is God, who decides where all delegated authority resides.

It may surprise some to hear that **even the authority that Jesus Christ exercised was given to Him by God the Father** – and therefore was **delegated authority**. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”* In John 5:27, Jesus said, *“He (God the Father) gave to the Son of Man the authority to execute judgment.”* And in John 8:28, Jesus said, *“I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.”*

Jesus acted under the delegated authority given to Him by God the Father. *If Jesus recognized and acknowledged His authority was delegated to Him by God the Father, who are we to question God’s decision regarding delegated authority in the home and in the church?* And in this, **Jesus’ ‘ontological equality’ within the Trinity was not diminished in any way.**

Harold Hoehner, in addressing the differences in the roles of men and women in the church, asserted that the entire issue of women serving in ecclesiastical roles that include the exercise of authority over men in the church rests on *two obscure passages: 1 Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1*. He used the term ‘*obscure*’ because the 1 Timothy 3:11 seems terribly out of place, and the Romans passage pushes the issue on the basis of the gender of a Greek noun that in the majority of occurrences does not refer to the official office of Deacon.