

Chapter 11

THE VALUABLE MINISTRIES OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF MALE LEADERSHIP:

A SURVEY OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES AND TEACHING

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This chapter focuses on the valuable ministries of women in the Scriptures. This is a crucial topic for at least three reasons. First, men often have hurt women. They have treated them as lesser citizens of the kingdom, and some men have denigrated or overlooked their contribution in ministry. An examination of the Scriptures will show that women have played a vital role in ministry. One reason for the current feminist movement, although not the only one, is that some women are responding to men who have oppressed them and treated them poorly.

Second, contemporary women should be encouraged by the women in the Scriptures who have contributed to the spread of God's kingdom message. God does not use men alone to accomplish His purposes. Both sexes are created in God's image, and both men and women have been used mightily by God. No woman who has a desire to please God should feel that there is no place for her ministry in the church.

Third, some contemporary evangelical writers appeal to the ministries of women in the Scriptures to support the notion that there should be no limits on women's roles in ministry today. They maintain that women and men should have equal access to every ministry function and that any limits on women derive from culture and tradition, not from the Bible, which they believe supports the full inclusion of women in any ministry.

This third area is particularly important. We will examine it carefully in this chapter, for if the examples of ministry by women in the Bible indicate that there should be no limits on women in ministry, then the church should open the doors of every ministry to women. We should be open to the possibility that we have misread the Scriptures by imposing some restrictions on women in ministry. Perhaps our culture and tradition have drawn lines and distinctions that cannot be supported from the Bible. Thus, we should listen to and evaluate carefully the arguments of those who contend that the ministries of women portrayed in the Bible demonstrate that every ministry that is open to men is also open to women.

I. Ministry in a General Sense

This chapter will focus on the third issue since that is a matter of particular debate today. Nevertheless, we should remind ourselves that ministry is a very broad word, stemming from the Greek words *diakonia*, *diakonos*, and *diakoneo*, and these words often convey the idea of "service" and "ministry" in the broadest sense. For example, Martha was distracted because of her "service" or "ministry" (*diakonia*), and the "service" being described is preparation of a meal (Luke 10:40). In Luke 22:27, one "one who serves" is contrasted to "one who reclines" (nasb) during the meal. The "ministry" in view is simply serving tables. Luke 8:1-3 tells of a number of women who were ministering (*diakoneo*) to Jesus and the apostles. The specific ministry they engaged in was not preaching the gospel but providing financial resources so that Jesus could carry on His ministry. First Peter 4:10 says that all spiritual gifts are to be used to "minister" (*diakoneo*) to one another in the church. And Paul says, "There are different kinds of service (*diakonia*), but the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:5). So in this broad sense, anything any Christian does to help the work of the church is a ministry.

Other examples of the use of the words ministry and service in this general sense could be cited, but the point to be made is this: Not all ministries that are valuable are public or official ministries. Providing food and support for others is crucial, and this ministry should not be scorned, even if one does not get public recognition for it. Many unnamed men and women of God have quietly and humbly worked behind the scenes in this way, and they have found great joy and blessing in doing so. I am not suggesting that this is the only ministry role for women. Nevertheless, it is a crucial one that should not be overlooked. Those who denigrate such a role are downplaying the function of many men and women who have labored with love.

Women, then, have engaged in significant ministries, even if those ministries were unofficial. One thinks of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. Abigail was not a prophetess and had no other official ministry that we know of. Nevertheless, her humble and gentle advice to David persuaded him not to kill Nabal. How many unrecorded events there must be of women persuading men, humbly and gently, to pursue a more righteous course! What a good model this story is for traditionalists who think being a leader means they must always know the truth and that their opinion is always right. David was certainly the leader in this account, but his humility is evident in that he listened to Abigail and was persuaded. For women, Abigail is a model of gentle and humble persuasion. There was no stridency or imperiousness about her manner. She was winsome, yet bold.

The “unofficial” ministries of women, therefore, are of great importance, and some men, by desiring leadership for its status and power as the Gentiles do (Mark 10:42ff.), have contributed to the idea that these ministries are insignificant. Such a secular concept of ministry has done great damage in Christ’s church.

II. The Argument for Full Inclusion of Women in All Ministries

The rest of the chapter will focus on the “official” or publicly recognized ministries of women in the Bible. What ministries did they have, and what are the implications of these ministries for today? We will begin by considering the evidence and arguments of those who think there are no limits on women in ministry.¹ We will not evaluate these arguments until all the evidence for the full inclusion of women in ministry is presented. Otherwise, we may be guilty of not giving both sides of the debate a full and fair hearing.

A. Prophetesses

Those who see no restrictions on women in ministry argue that the prophets of both the Old Testament and the New Testament were authoritative messengers of God. Women clearly functioned as prophetesses in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Miriam is explicitly called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20, and she led the women in singing for Yahweh’s triumph over Egypt (Exodus 15:21). The prophetess Huldah was consulted by the messengers of Josiah in 2 Kings 22:14-20. Other women probably functioned as prophetesses in the Old Testament but are unmentioned (cf. Isaiah 8:3), and Ezekiel pronounces judgment against daughters who prophesy falsely (Ezekiel 13:17-24). Compare also Nehemiah’s words against the prophetess Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). The problem here was not that these women prophesied, but that they did not prophesy according to the word of the Lord.

For our purposes, the most significant example of a prophetess is Deborah (Judges 4:4-5). Evangelical feminists consider Deborah particularly significant because she functioned as a judge over Israel, which would include judging men, and she exercised authority over the man Barak, who was a commander of the Israelite troops.

In the New Testament, too, women prophesy, and there may even be some indication that it was more common for them to do so. The prophetess Anna thanked God and spoke of Him when Jesus was brought to the temple (Luke 2:36-38). Peter cites Joel’s prophecy that when the Spirit is poured out both “sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on

my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18; cf. Joel 2:28-32).

Philip’s four daughters are one indication that this promise was fulfilled, for they all prophesied (Acts 21:9). Paul also encourages women to prophesy, with proper adornment (1 Corinthians 11:5). Those who argue for full inclusion of women in every ministry point out that if Paul thought such prayer and prophecy were wrong, he certainly would not bother to explain in such detail how they should be adorned while they were sinning!

It is concluded, then, from both the Old Testament and the New, that women functioned as prophets, and they used this gift for the edification of the people of God. In addition, prophecy, according to those who argue for no limits on women’s ministries, is defined as an authoritative declaration of God’s Word; thus, if women can prophesy, they can perform any ministry. They argue that prophecy is just as important and as authoritative as teaching. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the gift of prophecy is ranked above teaching. Now, nearly everyone agrees that women can function as prophets, for the evidence here is clear, but if women can function as prophets, it would seem that they can also function as teachers today, because prophecy is just as authoritative as teaching.

B. Women Teachers and Spiritual Gifts

Moreover, those who contend for no restrictions on women in ministry argue that women function as teachers. When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos teach, they took him aside and explained the gospel more accurately to him (Acts 18:26). The inclusion of Priscilla indicates that she must have taught Apollos as well. In fact, Luke mentions her first, and some suggest this implies that she did more of the teaching. Such ministry by Priscilla does not seem to be a one-time affair. In Romans 16:3, Paul greets both Priscilla and Aquila. He labels them his fellow-workers in the gospel, which implies that they shared in the gospel ministry with him. Their involvement in ministry is also confirmed by 1 Corinthians 16:19, for there Paul says that a church is in their house.

The argument for women teachers is also set forth from spiritual gifts. Teaching is a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:12; Romans 12:7), and yet there is no indication that women are excluded from this gift. All Christians are told to teach one another (Colossians 3:16) and to share with the community what they have learned (1 Corinthians 14:26). Surely this must include women. Indeed, Priscilla, as we have seen above, seems to use the gift in instructing Apollos. Paul also mentions women in the role of teaching in Titus 2:3.

Those who advocate no restrictions on women in ministry say that passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 should not be used to impose limitations on women today. First Timothy 2:11-15, they say, was not written to forbid all teaching of men by women. Paul here is only forbidding false teaching by women, or (according to others) preventing women who were uneducated from teaching men. First Corinthians 14:33b-36 was probably written to resolve a problem in the congregation where women were disrupting the assembly by speaking in tongues or by interrupting the service with questions. Or perhaps the passage quotes a Corinthian slogan or question that Paul rejects. Some also think that verses 34-35 were not part of the original text of 1 Corinthians and that they were added by a later scribe. These two passages, therefore, are designed to correct abuses by women in teaching, it is argued, not to forbid any teaching of men whatsoever. The fact that women could prophesy, which, it is claimed, cannot be distinguished from authoritative teaching, and that Priscilla engages in teaching, shows that the prohibitions in these two passages are not absolute.

C. Women as Fellow-workers and Laborers

It has already been noted that in Romans 16:3 Paul calls Priscilla a “fellow worker” (sunergos). It is instructive to note others who are called Paul’s fellow workers: Timothy (Romans 16:21; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 1), Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:9), Urbanus

(Romans 16:9), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Aristarchus (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), Mark (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), Jesus Justus (Colossians 4:10), Epaphras (Philemon 24), Demas (Philemon 24), and Luke (Philemon 24). Some of those listed here we know very little about, but we know that Timothy, Apollos, Titus, Epaphroditus, Mark, Epaphras, and Luke proclaimed the gospel. Does it not follow, then, say those who espouse full inclusion of women in every ministry, that Priscilla as a fellow worker did the same? Moreover, Priscilla is not the only woman whom Paul calls a fellow-worker. In Philippians 4:2, he exhorts two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to agree in the Lord. In 4:3, he says that they struggled together with him in the gospel along with Clement and the rest of the fellow-workers. The implication is that Euodia and Syntyche were fellow-workers. They struggled together in the gospel by helping Paul spread the good news of salvation.

The point can even be made more specific. In 1 Corinthians 16:16, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be subject to the house of Stephanas and to “every fellow worker (*panti sunergounti*) and laborer (*kopiōnti*).” We have already seen that three women are called fellow workers: Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche. Paul says that the Corinthians are to be subject to all fellow-workers and laborers. It would seem to follow, according to those who reject any limits on women today, that since Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche were fellow-workers, these women held leadership positions in the church and, therefore, men were subject to them.

It is also noted that Paul says to be subject to “every laborer” (*panti . . . kopiōnti*) as well as every fellow worker (1 Corinthians 16:16). Paul often describes his ministry using this same word for labor (1 Corinthians 4:12; 15:10; Galatians 4:11; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 1:29; 1 Timothy 4:10). Indeed, the work of other leaders is also described in terms of laboring. The Corinthians are to submit to the house of Stephanas, which labors for them (1 Corinthians 16:16). The Thessalonians are exhorted “to respect those who work hard [or labor] among you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12), and these are clearly the leaders, because Paul goes on to say that they are “over you in the Lord and admonish you.” The elders who rule well should receive double honor, according to 1 Timothy 5:17, “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” Clearly, then, Paul often uses the verb labor to denote authoritative ministry and instruction. But Paul also mentions women who have labored. In Romans 16:6, he instructs the Romans to greet Mary, who labored much for them. And in Romans 16:12, three women, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, are said to have labored much in the Lord. Some conclude, therefore, that women were leaders in the congregations, for the word labor is clearly used in this sense in 1 Corinthians 16:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, and 1 Timothy 5:17.

D. Women Deacons

It is also argued that women functioned in official positions in the church because they held the office of deacon. Many scholars have argued that this is the most probable interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11. In 1 Timothy 3:8-10 and 12, the qualifications are given for men who are to serve as deacons. In 3:11, Paul says: “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things” (*nasb*). The word for “women” here (*gunaikas*) could be translated “wives” (as in *niv*), and that is the view of some commentators. The following reasons are given to support the idea that Paul is speaking of women deacons: (1) Paul introduces the women mentioned here in the same fashion he introduced the men in 1 Timothy 3:8, i.e., he uses the word likewise. In 3:1-7, Paul lays out the qualifications for elders, and in 3:8 Paul says likewise there are similar qualifications for deacons. The likewise in 3:11 suggests that the qualifications for men who are deacons also apply to women deacons.

(2) If Paul were speaking of wives of deacons, he could have made this very clear by adding of deacons (*diakonōn* or *autōn*). By leaving the word women without any modifier, he implied that he was speaking of women in general, not just of the wives of

deacons. (3) The qualifications Paul mentions in 3:12 are identical with or similar to those required of deacons, and this suggests that an office is in view.²

Further evidence that women functioned as deacons is found in the case of Phoebe. In Romans 16:1, Paul says that she was “a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae” (rsv). Actually, the word deaconess here is the same as the one used in 1 Timothy 3:8 and Philippians 1:1, where Paul writes of deacons. Thus, Paul is not calling Phoebe a “deaconess,” but a “deacon,” some have claimed. In addition, Phoebe is called a leader (*prostatis*) in Romans 16:2. The most commonly used translations (rsv, nasb, niv) use the word help or helper here, but it has been claimed that this term is a technical one used for a legal protector or leader. If such an interpretation is correct, Paul here recommends Phoebe as a deacon and as a leader of many.

E. Women Elders

Evidence is also adduced that women could function as elders. The letter of 2 John is addressed to “the chosen lady,” and it is claimed that this does not refer to the church as a whole because the chosen lady is distinguished from her children (2 John 1, 4). The “chosen lady” refers to a woman who had authority over her children. Such authority is similar to the office of elder. Moreover, some suggest that Paul speaks of women elders in Titus 2:3. Although this is obscured by translations that render *presbytidas* by “older women,” it is clear that this word is a feminine rendering of the term *presbyteros* (elder) that Paul uses in Titus 1:5 to refer to church office.

F. Women Apostles

Most significantly, it is frequently claimed that women also functioned as apostles. In Romans 16:7, Paul writes, “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles. . . .” Some commentators have thought that Junias was a man, and that the name here is a contracted form of the word Junianus. Nevertheless, this is said to be an unpersuasive argument, for there is no example in Greek literature of this name being contracted. Thus, some have said that the name should be translated “Junia” (feminine) rather than “Junias” (masculine), showing that a woman is almost certainly included among the apostles here. Others have contended that the Greek (*en tois apostolois*) means “outstanding in the eyes of the apostles,” not “outstanding among the apostles.” Of course, such a rendering would exclude Andronicus and Junia(s) from the apostolic circle. The text would simply say that the apostles held them in high esteem. But it is claimed that this is an unnatural way to understand the Greek, and the most probable rendering is “outstanding among the apostles.” To sum up: there seems to be evidence here that a woman was an apostle, and this raises a serious question against those who want to deny women full participation in leadership positions in the church.

G. Conclusion

To sum up, the argument often given for full inclusion in ministry is cumulative. Women functioned as prophets, and such a ministry is just as authoritative as teaching. Women possess all the spiritual gifts, and this includes the gifts of teaching and leadership. Indeed, there is evidence in the New Testament that women held the offices of deacon, elder, and apostle. All of this evidence is in accord with Paul’s designation of women as fellow-workers in the gospel. The passages that seem to limit women in ministry can be explained from the situation that Paul addresses and thus should not be used to impose restrictions on women. The burden of proof, then, is said to be on those who want to impose restrictions on women in ministry.

III. The Argument for Some Restrictions on Women in Ministry

The preceding section has rightly shown that women participated in various forms of ministry in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The question is whether its argument establishes the case that no restrictions are to be placed on women in ministry. I

think not. I propose to prove below that women participated in ministry in the Scriptures, but their ministry was a complementary and supportive ministry, a ministry that fostered and preserved male leadership in the church. Thus, the ministry of women in the church was notable and significant, but it never supplanted male leadership; instead, it functioned as a support to male leadership. This view does not rule out all ministry for women. Instead, it sees the ministry of women as complementary and supportive.

A. Prophetesses

One of the strongest arguments for full inclusion of women in authoritative positions of leadership stems from the prophetic role women played in the Scriptures. Deborah, as we have seen, stands out as an authoritative messenger of Yahweh. Nevertheless, the evidence from prophecy actually indicates a supportive and complementary role for women. It buttresses the point that role distinctions between men and women are maintained. An examination of the evidence will indicate how this is so.

That women prophesied to men is clear in the case of Deborah, other women cited above, and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. The last passage cited, however, is absolutely crucial for rightly understanding a woman's relationship to man as she prophesies. What is Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16? It is that women who prophesy do so with proper adornment. Why is Paul concerned about how they are adorned? Because a woman's adornment says something about her relationship with men (11:3-10). Indeed, as I show in Chapter 5 of this volume, 11:3 is the key to the passage: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (niv). Thus, the reason Paul wants women to be adorned properly is that this adornment shows that a woman is submissive to male headship, even while prophesying. The way she is adorned indicates whether the man is the head, i.e., the authority.

The implications for our study are clear. Paul affirms that women can prophesy, but even in the process of prophesying they are to do so in a manner and with a demeanor that will not violate male headship. Paul does not place the same limits on men, and thus upholds and preserves the notion that male leadership is God's ordained pattern in the church. Note carefully that this does not mean that women will not prophesy in church. Paul affirms that women have prophetic gifts, and he wants them to exercise those gifts in church, but he does not want them to overturn male leadership.

The only passage that creates any difficulty for such a supportive and complementary view of prophecy is Judges 4, where Deborah commands Barak what to do and is a judge in Israel. But there are several reasons why this is in harmony with the notion of male headship explained in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: (1) Deborah is a special case because she seems to be the only judge in Judges who has no military function. The other judges also lead Israel into victory in battle, but Deborah receives a word from the Lord that Barak is to do this (Judges 4:6-7). Deborah is not asserting leadership for herself; she gives priority to a man. (2) There is an implied rebuke of Barak because he is not willing to go to battle without Deborah (Judges 4:8). Because of his reluctance, the glory that day will go to a woman (Judges 4:9), but note that the woman is not Deborah but Jael (Judges 4:17ff.). In other words, Deborah did speak the word of God, but her attitude and demeanor were such that she was not asserting her leadership. Instead, she handed over the leadership, contrary to the pattern of all the other judges, to a man.

(3) Both Deborah and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) exercised their gift of prophecy differently from the men who possessed the gift. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other male prophets exercised a public ministry where they proclaimed the word of the Lord. But note that Deborah did not prophesy in public.³ Instead, her prophetic role seems to be limited to private and individual instruction. Judges 4:5 says, "And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment" (nasb). Note that Deborah did not go out

and publicly proclaim the word of the Lord. Instead, individuals came to her in private for a word from the Lord. The difference between Deborah's prophetic ministry and that of male Old Testament prophets is clear. She did not exercise her ministry in a public forum as they did. Note that even when she speaks to Barak she calls him and speaks to him individually (Judges 4:6,14). And the song of praise in Judges 5:1 was sung by both Deborah and Barak together. A confirming argument for this view is found in the case of Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20). She did not publicly proclaim God's word. Rather, she explained in private the word of the Lord when Josiah sent messengers to her. She exercised her prophetic ministry in a way that did not obstruct male headship. The prophetic ministry of Miriam is no exception to this, because she ministered only to women. "Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them . . ." (Exodus 15:20, *my italics*).

(4) It is perhaps also significant that most of the other prominent judges in the book of Judges are explicitly said to have been raised up by the Lord:⁴ Othniel (3:9), Ehud (3:15), Gideon (6:14), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25; 14:6). But in the case of Deborah, there is no explicit statement that the Lord raised her up: we simply read, "Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4). I am not suggesting that the Lord did not raise her up, for He did bring evident blessing to Israel through her, but it may indicate that the nature of her role as a prophet and a judge was different from that of the other judges in that she did not exercise leadership over men as the other judges did. Such an observation harmonizes with the three points above.⁵

Also, prophecy differs from teaching. Prophecy is based on spontaneous revelation (1 Corinthians 14:29-33a), while teaching is an exposition of received revelation. A prophet, therefore, does not hold the same office as a teacher. Prophets speak forth God's revelation to the people, but the people go to the priests in the Old Testament to receive authoritative instruction based on tradition (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 21:5; Malachi 2:6-7). It is instructive to note in the Old Testament that some women were prophets, but never priests. It is the priests who had the more settled and established positions of leadership in Israel. This is not to deny that the Old Testament prophets spoke with great authority. Indeed, they criticized priests who abused their authority. The point is that prophecy is a different kind of gift from teaching, and when women functioned as prophets they did so with a demeanor and attitude that supported male leadership.

In addition, Wayne Grudem has argued that the gift of prophecy in the New Testament is not the same as the prophetic gift in the Old Testament.⁶ Old Testament prophets spoke the word of the Lord, and what they said was absolutely authoritative-no part of it could be questioned or challenged. Every word was to be received as God's very word. But the words of New Testament prophets do not have this kind of absolute authority. Paul calls on the church to sort and sift the good from the bad in prophetic utterances: "Do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, *rsv*; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:29-33a). When Paul says, "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29), he uses a verb for "weigh carefully" (*diakrino*) that means "to sort or sift some things from others." This implies that in New Testament prophecies, not every word would be understood to be the word of God. By contrast, in the Old Testament, a prophet who spoke anything untrue was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22). Instead, New Testament prophecies are handled not as authoritative words from God but as spontaneous impressions or insights that may or may not be, either in whole or in part, from God. Thus, the church must judge and evaluate prophecies in order to determine whether they, either in whole or in part, are sound.

Why is this distinction relevant to our discussion? It provides further evidence, particularly with regard to New Testament prophecy, that the gift of prophecy is not as authoritative as the gift of teaching.⁷ Teaching involves a sustained and orderly exposition of divine revelation already given, while prophecy in the New Testament occurs when someone has a spontaneous revelation or impression, the whole or parts of which may or may not be from the Lord. The church does not accept such “revelations” uncritically, but weighs them carefully. Thus, the fact that women utter prophecies in church does not logically imply that they can exercise a teaching gift over men, for the two gifts are quite different.

To sum up, those women who had the authoritative gift of prophecy in the Old Testament did not exercise it in a public forum as male Old Testament prophets did. The reason for this is that such a public exercise of authority would contradict male headship. In the New Testament, women could prophecy in a public forum, but Grudem has shown that prophecy in the New Testament is not as authoritative as either prophecy in the Old Testament or teaching in the New Testament. And even if one were to reject Grudem’s interpretation, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 makes it clear that women who prophesied in the New Testament were to do so in such a way that they acknowledged and supported male headship. Thus, the Biblical teaching on women prophets does not contradict male headship; instead, it supports male leadership in the church.

B. Teaching and Spiritual Gifts

We noted above, however, that Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), and women have all the spiritual gifts, including teaching (Titus 2:3-4) and leadership. Several things can be said in response to this: (1) It is hard to tell from the Acts account to what extent Priscilla taught Apollos, since both Priscilla and Aquila are named. It is precarious to base much on this text, since it is an argument from silence to say that Priscilla was the primary teacher. (2) Even if Priscilla did all the teaching, this is not the same thing as teaching publicly in an authoritative position of leadership. Surely, Abigail “taught” David in the passage we looked at in 1 Samuel 25, but no one would say she had a position of leadership over men. More is often established from the example of Priscilla and Aquila than is warranted from the text.⁸ (3) The word Paul uses for teaching in Titus 2:4 is not the usual one, but derives from *so-phronizo*, which means “to advise, encourage, or urge.” In any case, this passage does not support women teaching men, because the verses say that the older women are to teach the younger women. If anything, this text supports the traditional view that sees a complementary but distinct role for women.

(4) The argument from spiritual gifts is not phrased carefully enough. Women surely have all the spiritual gifts, but does that mean that there are no restrictions regarding the exercising of those gifts? If our interpretation of passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is correct, then women cannot publicly exercise their spiritual gift of teaching over men. This is not to deny that women have the gift of teaching or leadership. The point is that they are primarily to exercise those gifts among women. The idea that women are to exercise their gifts of leadership and teaching with other women harmonizes beautifully with Paul’s instructions to older women in Titus 2:3ff. It is inappropriate hermeneutically to conclude from Paul’s teaching on spiritual gifts that there is no limitation on women in ministry. One must consider all of Paul’s teaching on the subject, and then what he says about spiritual gifts should be integrated with his instructions elsewhere.

C. Women as Fellow-workers and Laborers

Several texts were cited above that spoke of women being fellow-workers and laborers. Since these terms are often used of men who exercised leadership, and since in 1 Corinthians 16:16 the church is called to submit to such, it was inferred that women had leadership positions in the church. But this argument is only convincing if these words are technical terms for positions of leadership, and it is not clear that the terms are

technical. That women played a significant role in gospel ministry is clear from the use of these terms, but it is unwarranted to derive from these terms alone the nature of their ministry. The terms fellow-worker and laborer are vague. There are many ways that women could have been fellow-workers and laborers without holding leadership positions over men. The clear teaching of Paul elsewhere (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-15) must be the guide for understanding the role of women rather than the appeal to terms that are too vague to support the idea of women sharing full leadership with men. Women could, for example, be prophets and probably deacons (see below) without violating male leadership, and yet surely such women would be fellow-workers and laborers.

It could still be objected that Paul says to be subject to every fellow-worker and fellow laborer (1 Corinthians 16:16). Paul says in verses 15-16, “Now, brethren, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer” (rsv). What is crucial to see is that the command to be subject (hypotasso) to every fellow-worker and laborer is found in a particular context, and thus it cannot be generalized to prove that women were church leaders. Verses 15-16 make it clear that the household of Stephanas and others who worked with them were the leaders in the Corinthian church.⁹ There is no evidence in the context that any of these fellow workers and laborers in Corinth were women. In fact, the only leader mentioned, Stephanas, is clearly a man. Since the words fellow-worker and laborer are vague and can refer to men or women, there needs to be indisputable evidence that women are included here as leaders in the church, especially since such leadership is not stated elsewhere. Let me put the same argument another way: The words fellow-worker and laborer do not indicate that someone is a church leader, although that does not mean that these terms are never used of church leaders. All church leaders would be fellow-workers and laborers, but not all fellow-workers and laborers are necessarily church leaders.¹⁰

One other objection should be handled. Some may conclude that the reference to the “household of Stephanas” shows that women must be included. This argument, however, proves too much. Surely, no one would say that the children in Stephanas’s house were church leaders, and yet they were part of his house. Those who want to prove that women held positions of authority over men must prove their case with arguments from indisputable examples rather than from the vague wording that Paul uses here.

D. and E. Women Deacons and Elders

Does not the inclusion of women as deacons, however, prove that they can hold an authoritative office? We have seen that many think that Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16:1. It should be noted, however, that the word diakonos, as we pointed out above, is often a general term, and thus one cannot be sure that Phoebe was a deacon.¹¹ And it is very unlikely that the word prostatis (Romans 16:2) is being used to say that Phoebe was a leader, as an examination of that verse shows. Paul commends Phoebe to the Romans and says “help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper [this is the word some think should be translated “leader”] of many, and of myself as well (nasb).” That Phoebe is being called a leader here is improbable for three reasons. (1) It is highly improbable that Paul would say that Phoebe held a position of authority over him. He says that about no one except Christ, not even the Jerusalem apostles (Galatians 1:6-7, 11), so confident is he of his high authority as an apostle (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:37-38; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). (2) There seems to be a play on words between the word prostatis and the previous verb, pariste \bar{m} i, in 16:2. Paul says to help (pariste \bar{m} i) Phoebe because she has been a help (prostatis) to many, including to Paul himself. It fits the context better to understand Paul as saying “help Phoebe because she has been such a help to others and to me.” (3) Although the

related masculine noun *prostate* can mean “leader,” the actual feminine noun (*prostat*) does not take the meaning “leader” but is defined as “protectress, patroness, helper.”¹²

With respect to women deacons, we need not come to a firm decision, for even if women were deacons this does not refute our thesis regarding male governance in the church.¹³ Even if women were appointed as deacons, they were not appointed as elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Two qualities demanded of elders—being apt to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) and governing of the church (1 Timothy 3:5)—are not part of the responsibility of deacons (cf. also 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:17, 28ff.). The deacon’s task consisted mainly in practical service to the needs of the congregation. This is suggested by Acts 6:1-6, where the apostles devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (6:4), while the seven are selected to care for the practical concern of the daily distribution to widows.¹⁴ Elders were given the responsibility to lead and teach the congregation. Thus, women being appointed to the supportive and complementary role of deacons supports the major thesis of this chapter, as does the exclusion of women from the office of elder. So far, what we have seen is consistent with the Old Testament pattern. Women in the Old Testament functioned occasionally as prophets but not as priests. In the New Testament, women functioned as prophets and probably deacons but not as elders.¹⁵

Some have argued for women elders, as we have seen above, from the “chosen lady” in 2 John and Paul’s reference to women who teach in Titus 2:3ff. The “chosen lady” in 2 John is almost certainly not an individual woman but a reference to the church.¹⁶ (1) John uses the second person plural in verses 6, 8, 10, and 12. The plural demonstrates that he is not writing to one person only; he is writing to an entire church. (2) Second John is much more general and less specific than 3 John. Third John was clearly written to an individual, Gaius, but the lack of specificity in 2 John suggests that a community is being addressed rather than an individual. (3) The description of the church as a “lady” accords well with the rest of Scripture. Paul and John both portray the church as Christ’s bride (Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7). The new Jerusalem is described as a bride (Revelation 21:2). In the Old Testament, Israel is often portrayed as a woman (Isaiah 54:1; Jeremiah 6:23; 31:21; Lamentations 4:3, 22). (4) The distinction between the “lady” and “her children” in 2 John does not suggest that she is distinct from her children. The “lady” is the church as a whole; the “children” are simply the individual members of the church.

Those who find a reference to women elders in Titus 2:3 are clearly mistaken. Paul uses the word *presbytidas* here, which means “older women.” The usual word for “elders” who served in church office in the Bible is related but different: *presbyteros* (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22ff.; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1, 5). Now, someone might say that Paul uses this different word because in Titus 2:3 he is referring to women elders. The problem with this is that the usual word for “elders,” *presbyteros*, could easily have been made feminine (*presbytera*) if Paul wanted to refer to women elders. Paul did not use a feminine form of the word *presbyteros* here; he used a distinct word that never refers to elders.

Titus 2:2 demonstrates clearly that Paul was not speaking of women elders in Titus 2:3. In verse 2, Paul addresses the “older men.” Now it is clear that Paul is not referring to elders here who hold a church office of authority, for he does not use the word that indicates such an office, *presbyteros*. Instead, Paul uses a word that always refers to “older men,” *presbytas* (cf. Luke 1:18; Philemon 9). Paul could have used the word for elders that conveys church office in Titus 2:2, but instead he used a distinct word that refers to older men. He uses the related word that refers to older women in Titus 2:3. Thus, there is no doubt that Paul is speaking of older women in Titus 2:3, not of women elders.

F. Women Apostles

Of course, if Junias was a woman apostle (Romans 16:7), then a tension is created between the apostleship of Junias (if Junias was a woman) and the other arguments adduced in this chapter, for apostles were certainly the most authoritative messengers of God in the New Testament. But it should be said from the outset that this passage is unclear. Now, some scholars contend that lack of clarity is also a problem in texts like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15, but the passages are not analogous in one respect. The texts in First Corinthians and Timothy, although they have their difficulties, contain a sustained argument, and the basic thrust of the passages is clear. Here, however, we have a single verse, and the meaning of that verse is not altogether clear. The passage is unclear in three ways. (1) It cannot be definitely established that Junias was a woman. The name may be a contraction of a man's name, Junianus.¹⁷ Of course, if this is true, then the text is irrelevant for the question before us. (2) Even though some scholars claim confidently that the verse means that Andronicus and Junias are outstanding apostles, it is also possible that the text is saying that they are "outstanding in the eyes of the apostles." (3) Even if we grant that Paul is speaking of a woman and he designates her as a distinguished apostle, what does he mean by the word apostle here? It is by no means clear that he is assigning Junias the same position that he assigns to himself, the twelve, and James (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). The word apostle in Paul could be used in a non-technical way refer to "messengers" or "representatives" (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). In any case, the verse is too ambiguous to be used to establish the notion that there were female apostles in the technical sense. (See also Chapter 2, Question 38 in this volume.)

In contrast, it is remarkable that Jesus did not select a single female apostle, and the other clearly apostolic figures in the New Testament are men: Paul, James, and Barnabas. Not one indisputable example of a female apostle can be given in the New Testament. G. Bilezikian says that Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles because of the "cultural constraints" that would have made the ministry of women "unacceptable."¹⁸ There are at least two problems with this view. (1) Nowhere else does Jesus give in to cultural pressures when a moral issue is at stake. To imply that He gave in for this reason impugns His courage and integrity. Jesus associated with tax-collectors and sinners, healed on the sabbath, commended Gentiles who had great faith, and rebuked the scribes and Pharisees. All of these actions brought considerable cultural pressure on Jesus, and yet He continued to do what He thought was right. Thus, it is unlikely that Jesus did not appoint a female apostle because of merely cultural reasons. (2) If, as Bilezikian asserts, Junias was an apostle, then Jesus' reluctance to appoint a woman apostle becomes even more blameworthy. For just a few years after Jesus' resurrection, the church (according to Bilezikian) is willing to appoint female apostles. Had the culture changed so dramatically in the few years since Jesus' ministry that now such appointments were feasible? Bilezikian's view suggests that the early church was even more courageous than Jesus, and this is surely incorrect!

It should also be said that some who argue for no restrictions on women in ministry argue from isolated and ambiguous verses, such as Romans 16:7 or Priscilla's teaching of Apollos in Acts 18:26. Others have appealed to the fact that there were churches in a woman's house, but that says nothing about who the leaders of the church were. The church met in Mary's house in Acts 12:12, but there is no reason to think Mary was the leader of the church in that situation. If a woman has a Bible study in her house today, that is no indication that she is the leader of that study. It is also irrelevant to appeal to the fact that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, treated women with dignity, and appeared to them first after His resurrection. Of course, Jesus treated women with dignity and respect, and we should learn from His example. But such examples are not directly relevant in discussing women in leadership roles.

G. Conclusion

In conclusion, men sometimes have gone farther than Scripture and suppressed the valuable ministry contributions of women. There are innumerable ministries with which a woman can become involved in order to further God's kingdom on earth. The ministries women do become involved in, however, should be complementary and supportive of the male leadership in the church. Such a supportive ministry does not rule out every public ministry of women when men are present. Many borderline cases depend on the demeanor and attitude of women.¹⁹ There are inevitably some gray areas in applying any basic principle of Scripture. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is clear that Biblical writers consistently ascribe ultimate responsibility to men for the leadership of the church.

IV. Valuable Ministries of Women

This chapter should not end on a negative note, for even though there are some restrictions on women in ministry, we want to highlight the valuable ministries of women in the church today. One could get the impression from this chapter that the main burden of Scripture is to limit women in ministry. Actually, Scripture lays only a few restrictions upon women. Indeed, the possibilities for ministry for women are myriad. It is not the case that there is nothing for women to do and so they might as well while away their time watching television.

No woman could possibly say that if there are some restrictions on women in ministry, then there is nothing valuable for her to do. Surely there is more work to do than can possibly be accomplished by men alone. Billions of people need to hear the gospel (most of them women and children), many people in our culture are without Christ, or they are hurting in innumerable ways. There is so much to do to advance the gospel of Christ that no woman should fear that there is no place for her ministry.

One of the most significant ministries for women (and men too!) is prayer. Without prayer, God's kingdom work on earth will not advance. If in practice we put prayer low on the list of our priorities, then we are actually saying that it is not crucial. How we need a revival of prayer in the church today, and a seeking after God that is intense and full of faith! What a significant ministry women can have in prayer for the work of God on earth!²⁰ Both women and men should ask God to pour out His Spirit on us so that the message of the gospel will go forth in power.

Women have advanced the gospel in missions, are advancing it, and will continue to advance it. A wife can aid her husband in innumerable ways in setting up a mission station. And as a wife she can exert, by word and quiet example, a remarkable impact on a godless culture, especially since so many people in that culture will be women and children. And I think women can proclaim the gospel to men in those cultures, for 1 Timothy 2:11-15 prohibits only authoritative teaching to a group of Christians within the church, not evangelism to those outside the church. Such proclamation of the gospel is not limited to men. She should clearly explain, however (as many missionary women have done in history), that men should assume leadership roles in the governance and teaching ministry of the church as soon as it is established.

Titus 2:3-5 indicates that mature women have the responsibility of instructing younger women regarding a life of godliness. There are more women in evangelical churches today than men, and how the church needs godly women who will instruct younger women in the Christian life! Any woman who has a gift for teaching will find great fulfillment in instructing other women in this way. The church is in great need of women who are theologically and Biblically sound to instruct younger women in the matters of the faith.

There are also some ways in which women can instruct both men and women, in my opinion, if the function of authoritative teaching to men is not involved. Thus, it is appropriate for women who travel as speakers to address a mixed audience as articulate and thoughtful representatives of a feminine perspective on many experiences of life.

One thinks here of the ministry of Elisabeth Elliot, whom God has used significantly. Moreover, women can exercise their creative gifts through writing, including the writing of curriculum, fiction, non-fiction, scholarly writing about Scripture, and editing. Several of today's most widely read Christian books have been written by women.

There are so many ministries today in which a woman can advance the cause of Christ and righteousness! I will list a few here so that one can get some idea of the wide scope available: engaging in personal witnessing and joining campus organizations committed to spreading the gospel, ministering to the sick and elderly, fighting against abortion, fighting against pornography, helping with literacy, writing to government leaders to support the cause of righteousness, helping the disabled, aiding the poor, ministering in prisons, counseling and praying with the troubled and confused, supporting missionaries and the church financially, visiting newcomers to the church, extending hospitality to the lonely, using artistic gifts by ministering in music, the visual arts, drama, and theater, helping in youth ministry, etc.

Probably one of the most significant ministry roles for women, although it is not their only role, is their role as wives and mothers. Paul says that mature women are to "train the younger women to love their husbands and children" (Titus 2:4). One thinks of the godly mothers in Scripture like Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, and Mary. What a significant role they played in the history of redemption as wives and mothers! Their influence on their husbands and children is still not fully known to us. Countless unknown wives and mothers have had a tremendous impact on their husbands and children, and the influence of these women will only be revealed on the day of redemption. What a tragedy it is that women's role as wives and mothers is often viewed as second best today! God has ordained that most women will find the greatest fulfillment in these very callings, and those who do should also realize that the example of their lives, lived faithfully with "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4), will have a lasting effect on many others around them.

Another area in which women can have a powerful ministry is with children in the church. Of course, not all women are intended to work with children. But churches are crying out today for women to work with children, and it is harder and harder to find women who are available. I think part of the reason is that our culture, even in the church, does not think such a ministry is very honorable or significant. Now, we need men to work with children as well, but, as other parts of this book show, women are particularly fitted by God to work with children. How we need women who love children to help mold our children in churches and schools by teaching and example!

Of course, other examples of significant ministry by women could be mentioned, but as we noted, the possibilities in a hurting and lost world are endless. God has fitted women for particular ministries for their own fulfillment and satisfaction and for His glory. Such ministry builds up the body of Christ so that the church can truly accomplish its work in the world.

Endnotes to Chapter Eleven

1. The argument for full inclusion of women in ministry presented here has been set forth by many authors, although there are differences among them. For a defense of full inclusion of women in every ministry similar to the position sketched here, see the following: A. J. Gordon, "The Ministry of Women," *Missionary Review of the World* 7 (1894): 910-921; A. H. Stouffer, "The Ordination of Women: Yes," *Christianity Today* 20 (February 1981): 256-259; S. S. Bartchy, "Power, Submission, and Sexual Identity Among the Early Christians," in *Essays on New Testament Christianity*, ed. C. R. Wetzel (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1978), pp. 64-67 and 70-74; L. Scanzoni and N. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986) pp. 78-81 and 85-

90; Patricia Gundry, *Woman Be Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 89-104; E. Margaret Howe, *Women and Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982) 30-36; Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 193-206; P. B. Payne, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo's Article, '1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance,'" *Trinity Journal* 2 (1981): 173-175, 183-185, and 190-197; J. Sigountos and M. Shank, "Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983): 283-295; K. Snodgrass, "Paul and Women," *Covenant Quarterly* 34 (1976): 3-13; A. B. Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), pp. 64-120.

2. Another argument in favor of woman deacons is that Paul says nothing about the wives of elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Such an omission is hard to explain if he is speaking of the wives of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11. One would expect that higher qualifications would be demanded of wives of elders than of wives of deacons. But if Paul is referring to women who were deacons, then the omission of women among elders is because women could not be elders, although they could be deacons. Of course, those who argue for full inclusion of women do not use this particular argument because it would exclude women from being elders, even though they could be deacons.

3. That prophetesses in the Old Testament did not proclaim the word of the Lord publicly is also argued by Origen. He thinks the same pattern was followed in the New Testament, but 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:29-33a make this latter assertion questionable. For the original text of Origen's comments, see "Origen on 1 Corinthians," *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1908-09): 41-42, LXXIV.279-280. For an English translation, see R. Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), pp. 28-29.

4. Less prominent judges are only treated with a summary of one to three verses: Shamgar (3:31), Tola (10:1-2), Jair (10:3-5), Ibzan (12:8-10), Elon (12:11-12), and Abdon (12:13-15). The author devotes more attention to Abimelech (9:1-57), but he was clearly wicked and there is no indication that the Lord empowered or called him. All citations from Scripture in this paragraph are from the nasb.

5. Isaiah 3:12 should also be noted, where Isaiah asserts that women ruling over men is a sign of God's judgment: "O My people! Their oppressors are children, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray, and confuse the direction of your paths" (nasb). Note the theme of judgment in Isaiah 3:1-4. Surely Deborah's role as a judge was not the same as what Isaiah condemns here. Thus, we can conclude that Deborah's role as prophet and judge was not exercised in such a way that she ruled over men.

6. Such a distinction, of course, raises many questions. For a careful explanation of all the issues involved, see Wayne Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987): 11-23. For a more extensive treatment of the same issue, see Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988).

7. Tertullian also made a distinction between prophecy and teaching, allowing prophetic utterances by women but not teaching. See *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 9,1; *Against Marcion*, 5, 8, 11.

8. The same point could be made regarding Colossians 3:16. That text refers not to public authoritative teaching by believers but to the mutual instruction and encouragement that occur when the community is gathered.

9. That the household of Stephanas held leadership in the Corinthian church is also suggested by 1 Clement 42:4 (95 a.d.), which reminds the Corinthians that the apostles appointed their “first fruits” (aparchē) as overseers and deacons, an apparent reference to the household of Stephanas, which is called the “first fruits (translated “first converts” by rsv) of Achaia” in 1 Corinthians 16:15.

10. Moreover, the word fellow worker in 1 Corinthians 16:16 is not from the noun form (sunergos), which occurs thirteen times elsewhere in the New Testament. Instead, Paul uses the participial form of the verb sunergeō. This verbal form is not necessarily a technical term for those who possess governing authority in the church, because in other contexts in the New Testament the verb is used in a general and non-technical way (cf. Romans 8:28; James 2:22). It is also most likely in the context that the fellow workers of Paul are described as “my fellow worker(s)” or “our fellow worker” (cf. Romans 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 1, 24).

11. One of the problems with the otherwise fine study of E. E. Ellis (“Paul and His Co-Workers,” *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], pp. 3-22) is that he interprets the terms diakonos and adelphos more technically than the evidence warrants. Both terms are often used in a very general way and often do not refer to specific ministry roles. Since diakonos is particularly relevant for our discussion, I list the texts where it occurs so that the evidence can be examined: Matthew 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5, 9; 12:26; Romans 13:4(2); 15:8; 16:1; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:15(2), 23; Galatians 2:17; Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; 4:6.

12. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; henceforward cited as BAGD), p. 718.

13. Although I incline to the opposite view for the reasons mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are several good arguments to the effect that women could not be deacons. We have noted previously that the use of the word diakonos (Romans 16:1) with reference to Phoebe does not establish that she was a deacon since the word is most often used of ministry in a general sense without any clear implication of church office. And a number of arguments can be adduced for the view that the women referred to in 1 Timothy 3:11 should be understood to be the wives of deacons rather than deacons:

(1) The qualification “husband of but one wife” in 1 Timothy 3:12 would naturally exclude women.

(2) Since the subject in verses 8-10 and 12-13 is male deacons, it would be unusual to switch the subject to female deacons in the middle of the discussion (verse 11) without giving explicit indication of that fact by some phrase such as “the women who serve as deacons likewise must be serious. . . .”

(3) A requirement for the wives of deacons would be appropriate in this context, since Paul sees the status and conduct of a man’s family as an essential qualification for church office (1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5, 12).

(4) The word likewise (hōsautōs) in verse 11 does not necessarily prove that women were deacons, because Paul may be commanding the wives to have the same virtues as the male deacons without implying that they shared the same office. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:25 Paul uses the same word likewise to compare good deeds with the sins described in verse 24, but no one would claim from this comparison that sins and good deeds are the same thing. Similarly, the injunction to the older women in Titus 2:3, which is introduced with likewise, does not imply that the older women are the same as the older men of Titus 2:2.

(5) Furthermore, the lack of a possessive genitive with *gunaikas* does not rule out the possibility that these women are wives of deacons, since elsewhere in the New Testament the possessive genitive is not used when it is clearly the case that the women or men being described are wives and husbands (cf. Colossians 3:18-19; Ephesians 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 7:2-4, 11, 14, 33; Matthew 18:25; Mark 10:2).

In conclusion, it cannot be established with certainty that women were deacons, although for the reasons stated earlier I am inclined to think they were.

14. Actually, the seven in Acts 6 are not called deacons, but they seem to carry out the function of deacons, and the verb related to the noun *deacon* is used in 6:2.

15. G. D. Fee, however, in *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody, MA; Hendrickson, 1988), p. 22, argues that the term *elders* was used as “a covering term for both overseers and deacons.” He says on p. 78, “It is altogether likely that both ‘overseers’ and ‘deacons’ come under the larger category *presbyteroi* (‘elders’).” If Fee is correct, then it would be wrong to distinguish between *elders* and *deacons* as I have done above, although one could still legitimately distinguish between overseers and deacons. But Fee’s claim that both overseers and deacons belong to the larger category called “*elders*” is hard to sustain and should be rejected for the following reasons: (1) The New Testament nowhere identifies “*elders*” and “*deacons*” so that the latter would be construed as a subcategory of the former. (2) There is a clear and indisputable distinction between “*overseers*” (*episkopoi*) and “*deacons*” (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). (3) But it is also clear that overseers and *elders* are two terms used to describe the same office. In Titus 1:5, Titus is charged to appoint “*elders*” in every city, and yet when Paul speaks of qualifications for this office he refers to an “*overseer*” in Titus 1:7. The singular *episkopos* (“*overseer*”) in Titus 1:7 (and 1 Timothy 3:1-2) is generic and there is no indication that only one overseer is in view. Thus, these two terms describe the same office. Such an identification is confirmed by Acts 20:17-38. In verse 17 Paul summons the “*elders*” of the Ephesian church in order to address them. However, in verse 28 these same “*elders*” are called “*overseers*.” So once again we see that “*elders*” and “*overseers*” are two different terms for the same office. (4) Fee does not give any evidence to support his claim that *elders* is a covering term for both overseers and deacons, and the evidence we have adduced above points in the opposite direction. Thus, Fee’s unsubstantiated assertion has no clear evidence to support it.

16. For a defense of this interpretation, see: R. E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 651-655; S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John (Word Bible Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1984), p. 318; J. R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 200-202.

17. A. T. Robertson, in *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), pp. 171-173, shows that such contraction of names was common in Greek and lists numerous examples in the Greek New Testament; cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. R. W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), henceforward cited as BDF], sec. 125). A. Spencer (*Beyond the Curse*, 101) responds that *Iouinian* in Romans 16:7 could not be a shortened form of the common man’s name *Junianus* because Latin names formed diminutives (or “*nicknames*”) by lengthening, not shortening the name. But Spencer either misunderstands or inaccurately misrepresents the data here, for Paul is writing in Greek, not Latin, and Robertson (p. 171; similarly, BDF, sec. 125[2]) notes that “this custom of giving short pet-names . . . was used not merely with Greek names, but also with foreign names brought into the Greek.” While Spencer cites James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1930] 1976), p. 306, to show that “*Junias*” as a man’s name has yet to be found in extra-Biblical sources, she

fails to mention that in that same entry (p. 306) they say that Iounian in Romans 16:7 “is probably a contracted form of Iunianus, which is common in the inscriptions.” In sum, no lexicon or grammar takes Spencer’s view that Iounias in Romans 16:7 could not be a shortened form of the man’s name Junianus, and all who comment on it (Robertson, BDF, BAGD, Thayer, and Moulton & Milligan) say not only that it could be but that it probably or possibly is a man’s name. See further the discussion of this issue in Chapter 2 of this volume, Question 38.

18. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, p. 236.

19. This is not to deny, of course, that the demeanor and attitude of men are important as well. The point is that Scripture teaches that women should support male headship by their demeanor and attitude; men are also to be humble and servants, but their demeanor and attitude is not intended to support women in authority.

20. See E. Christenson with V. Blake, *What Happens When Women Pray* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1975).