

SERVANTS



IN THE KINGDOM

by Randolph Dunn

Women Servants (Diakonos)

Randolph Dunn



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Women Servants (Diakonos)

*“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**”* (Galatians 3:26-28).
God is not partial. (Acts 10:34) All are priests to serve God. (Revelation 5:10)

The Greek word *diakonos* is a gender-neutral, either male or female. The Latin word for *diakonos* is minister, while the English word is servant. *Diakonos* or its variants occur 28 times in the New Testament, one of which refers to Phebe, a female servant (*diákonon*) and twice as deacon in Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Rom 16:1.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.” (1 Cor

12:27-29)

God through Paul set forth character traits for the shepherding function. Following the character or qualifications of these men Paul discusses character traits, qualifications of servants who apparently help in this important work of the overseers, watchmen, guardians, sentinels. Functions by other members of the Body are just as important, necessary, essential and indispensable whether performed by man or woman.

Women Identified by Name

In the New Testament several women are identified by name while inclusive words such as, all, each, everyone, include men and women. By examining activities of God's *diakonos* one should be able to determine if there are any functions Christian women are required to do or are prohibited from doing.

“But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds ... about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.’ And she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ But Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?’” (Acts 5:1-2; 7-9)

Comment: Sapphira and Ananias **lied to the Holy Spirit**, an intentional sin.

“Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.” (Acts 9:36)

Comment: Tabitha, Dorcas, helped the poor **by doing good and charitable works**. An activity done outside the assembly.

“He (Peter) went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.” (Acts 12:12)

Comment: Mary **used her house for saints to come together**. In this case the gathering was for the purpose of praying for safety of all Christians but especially for Peter, as a short time earlier Herod beheaded James.

“And after she (Lydia) was baptized she urged us saying ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.” (Acts 16:15)

Comment: Lydia **used her possessions to take care of the needs of Paul** and those accompanying him.

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” ... “Now these Jews (men and women) were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” ... “But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” (Acts 17:4, 11-12, 34)

Comment: Damaris **believed**. She was perhaps a prominent Athenian woman as she was in attendance at the Areopagus when Paul spoke.

“After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. ... Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus (as recorded in the Old Testament), though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” (Acts 18:1-2; 24-26)

Comment: “They,” Aquila and his wife Priscilla, **taught** Apollos not just Aquila.

“On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.” (Acts 21:8-9)

Comment: Philip’s daughters **prophesied**. From 1 Corinthians 14:21 we learn that prophecies are for believers. There is no indication that they prophesied only to women or only when not assembled.

“I commend to you our sister Phebe, a servant in the church in Cenchreae.” (Romans 16:1)

Comment: Some Bibles transliterate *diákonon* as deaconess. But every person, male or female, in Christ is a servant, *diakono*, in the Body of Christ as well as priests to serve God. The Bible is silent about the type of service Phebe rendered. All we know is she served. We also know she did not meet the unique qualifications for the work of servants having a wife translated as deacons in 1 Timothy 3:12.

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners.” (Romans 16:3-7)

Comment: We do not know what work Mary performed. However, we know she was not lazy as she **worked hard**.

“The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla), together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 16:19)

Comment: Priscilla and Aquila’s **home was open for Christians to assemble**.

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement.” (Philippians 4:2-3)

Comment: These women were apparently from Philippi. They helped Paul in teaching the Gospel. They did more than just being present to remove any appearance of impropriety. They taught the gospel as they labored with Paul and Clement.

"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well." (2 Timothy 1:5)

Comment: They passed their faith on to their family.

"To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house." (Philemon 1-2)

Comment: "Apphia" a Christian woman known to Paul and Philemon.

Women by Inclusive Words - All, Each and Everyone

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41) **Comment:** "Those who **received His Word**" include men and women.

"The disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea." (Acts 11:29) **Comment:** "Everyone" includes women, so women **helped in determining**.

"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas." (Acts 15:22)

Comment: The "whole church" includes women. Therefore, women **participated in choosing**.

"So, when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement." (Acts 15:30-31)

Comment: The "congregation" included women who **heard and rejoiced**.

"Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs." (Acts 24:23)

Comment: "Friends" included men and women who **attended to Paul's needs**.

*"There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for **everyone** who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."* (Romans 2:9-11)

Comment: "Every human" makes no distinction between men and women who **do good or evil**.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons ^a of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-29)

Comment: A son had a legal right to a father's inheritance. But "As many of you" who **were baptized** included women. Then women in Christ acquired the right of inheritance Paul then mentions that those in Christ are one. No one in Christ is a second-class Christian for all are servants and priests to serve God. (1 Peter 2:16 and Revelation 1:6)

"She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings." (1 Peter 5:13)

Comment: “She” could either be a Christian woman or an assembly of Christians – don’t know.

“The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth.” (2 John 1:1)

Comment: “The elect lady” could either be a Christian woman or an assembly of Christians – don’t know.

The terms all, each and every includes women. Therefore, Women are to participate for the Body of Christ to function as a united body otherwise part of the body is considered a drag on the body or dead.

Women’s Activity and Attitude

“So, whether you (male or female) eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head (Christ). But every woman praying or prophesying (neither prohibited) with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head; for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. For if a woman is not veiled let her also be shorn: but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled.” (1 Corinthians 10:31– 11:6)

Comment:

- always seek the other person’s well-being – 10:24
- whatever you do, glorify God – 10:31
- men and women, do not dishonor your head – 11:4 • do not treat the financial poor Christian as inferior – 11:21
- don’t consider your spiritual gift more important – 12:
- love is most important – it last forever. – 12:31-13:13
- encourage, respect, honor one another and especially those having responsibility for your well-being, avoid confusion – 14.

Comment: “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks” means do not be the cause of a Christian brother or sister to lose faith by ignoring their customs and traditions.

Comment: “Tradition” from the Greek word *paradóseis* meaning substance of the teaching. (Thayer’s)

Comment: “Prophesying” from the Greek word *profeeteuoo* meaning foretelling future events pertaining to the kingdom of God or to utter forth, declare, a thing which can only be known by divine revelation. (Thayer’s)

Comment:

“Every Man” from the Greek word *andrós* meaning either man or husband depending on contexts.

Comment: “Every Woman” from the Greek word *gunaikós* meaning either woman or wife.

Comment: “Shorn or shaven” - Women who had their hair shorn indicated punishment of whoredom, or adultery.
(Adam Clarke)

Comment: Paul is reminding the Corinthians that respect and honor is of utmost importance probably more than custom when praying or prophesying. The custom of the time was for men to remove their head covering in the presence of a superior and for women not to be seen in public without a head covering. So, was the head covering an act of righteousness or a custom of respect and honor? A husband could divorce his wife for such disrespect, not having her head covered. Paul's condemnation appears to be the dishonoring of God by a man who does not remove his head covering and by a woman dishonoring the man responsible for her wellbeing (husband, father or eldest brother) by not having her head covered by a veil. Both violate tradition and custom of respect in their society, or legal rights possibly imply acceptance of pagan practices. This does not prohibit either men or women from praying or prophesying. But one's freedom and liberty in Christ must never result in or lead to disrespect of others.

"A wife ought (under obligation) to have a symbol of authority (power) on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches" of God." (1 Corinthians 11:10-16)

Comment: The actions of a woman who disrespects her husband, her head, is not proper.

Comment: During the times before and after Christ when Rome ruled the world, most women were considered under the authority or power of men. For married women the veil covering their hair, 1) signified her marital status, 2) her submission to the husband's status as head, 3) an indication of modesty and purity and 4) protected her from men's solicitations. Women without a veil were considered rebellious often prostitutes with hair cut short, shorn or shaven heads. Customs in one culture are not binding as law in other cultures. Today in some areas of the world; e.g., India, women wear symbols of their marital status. After a Hindu marriage is consummated, the wife is never supposed to leave her arms bare. She must always wear bangles to signify that she is married.

Comment: The veil (Greek *palla*) was the symbol of a married woman, and in their culture a mark of husband's authority.

Comment: Those in Christ 'not independent of' suggest not superior or inferior but equal in value to God and needed in His kingdom. Equal in Christ does not alter God's directive that the man has the responsibility for the family unit and that the woman by creation was his helper and companion, not his servant. Any action she does that is against the teachings of Christ and His apostles or against local customs such that the community consider her actions out of place, she dishonors her husband and does not promote the cause of Christ.

Comment: Daily activities must display respect and honor which promotes unity in all relationships whether in the family, community, work place, government or church whether assembled or not. Everyone in Christ, man or woman, has equal spiritual status before God.

"What then, brothers when you come together, each one has a hymn, ¹ a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, ² or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up (encouragement). If any (man or woman) speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn (in sequence), and let someone (man or woman) interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them (man or woman) keep silent in church (the assembled body of Christ) and speak to himself (not gender specific) and to God. Let two or three prophets (not gender specific) speak, and let the others (not gender specific) weigh ³ what is said. If a revelation is made

to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches (congregations or assemblies) of the saints, the women (your women, wife – KJV, NKJV, YLT) should keep silent in the churches (ekklesiáis – assemblies). For they are not permitted to speak,⁴ but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands (ándras - any male person, a man – P C Bible Study Biblesoft) at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (1 Corinthians 14:26-36)

Comment: The Christians in Corinth were assembled together as Christ’s Body where they sang, taught (*didacheén*),⁵ gave revelations and spoke in other languages through interpreters. The purpose of assembling together was to encourage Christians to remain faithful and do good works. Speakers, men or women, who were not able to be understood because an interpreter was not present, were to keep quiet. Chaos and confusion caused by all at the same time praying, speaking or singing would cause visitors to think “you are out of your mind” and preventing God’s message from being heard. Allowing everyone speak or sing in succession, one following another, is respectful to God and one’s fellow man.

Comment: “Two or three prophets speak” – a prophet is a male or female through whom God speaks. (From Thayer's Greek Lexicon)

Comment: While still on the subject of maintaining orderliness, Paul instructs the Corinthian women to keep silent and not interrupt their (*idíous* – one’s own) husband but wait and ask him when you get home. Paul’s instructions would not apply to Christian women whose husbands were pagans, dead or had abandoned them. The key is to respect their husband who was teaching and to respect others – men, women or visitors. So, “the law” probably refers to synagogue rules or traditions.

Comment: When assembled together all Christians are to participate in an orderly manner while respecting others, not all speak at the same time creating confusion and chaos. Women are not to question or challenge comments of the man responsible for their wellbeing, whether their husbands, father or brother or display a disrespectful attitude especially toward any man.

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:12, 16)

Comment: The “chosen ones” include women and men. Both are to teach and admonish in wisdom, knowledge. The instruction is silent as to whether this is to be done in private or assembly. The text states the teaching and admonishing is done in song in the heart unto God. But teaching and admonishing one another requires one to speak from their heart whether written word or spoken.

¹ *Psalmón Strong's* NT#:1568; Vine's Expository Dictionary - primarily denoted "a striking or twitching with the fingers (on musical strings)"; then, "a sacred song, sung to musical accompaniment, a psalm. Strong's Numbers and Concordance - a set piece of music; i.e., a sacred ode (accompanied with the voice, harp or other instrument; a "psalm"); collectively, the book of the Psalms. Thayer's Lexicon - a striking, twanging.

² *Gloossa, gloóssee, Strong's* NT#:1100 - 1. the tongue, a member of the body, the organ of speech: Mark 7:33,35. 2. a tongue; i.e., the language used by a particular people in distinction from that of other nations (Thayer's Lexicon); i.e., “Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God Acts” (2:11 KJV).

³ *Diakrinétoosan Strong's* NT#:1252 – Thayer's Greek Lexicon - make a distinction, discriminate, distinguish.

⁴ *laleoo NT#:2980 - Thayer's Greek Lexicon* - to use words in order to declare one's mind and disclose one's thoughts;

⁵ *Didaskalos (didacheén)* - *Strong's* NT#:1321, - appears 97 times - 83 relating to the teachings of Jesus, Holy Spirit or the Apostles, 5 times to the Pharisees, 1 time each to John the Baptizer, women [1 Timothy 2], Jezebel and Balaam and 3 other times. *Didáskein* *Strong's* NT#: 1320, occurs 59 times – 46 as master in the Gospels, once as doctor in Luke, 1 time in the epistles as teacher and once as master in James.

Opinions Of A Few Commentaries:

Albert Barnes Notes

““They were not to teach the people, nor were they to interrupt those who were speaking’ Rosenmuller. It is probable that, on pretense of being inspired, the women had assumed the office of public teachers.”

Comment: They held to the didactic teaching method of lecturing / sermonizing.

Adam Clarke Commentary

“There was ‘a Jewish ordinance (note the statement “as the law also says”); women were not permitted to teach in the assemblies, or even to ask questions. The rabbis taught that ‘a woman should know nothing but the use of her distaff (a tool used in spinning).’ And the sayings of Rabbi Eliezer, as delivered, Bammidbar Rabba, sec. 9, fol. 204, are both worthy of remark and of execration; they are these: ‘Let the words of the law be burned, rather than that they should be delivered to women.’”

Roy C Deaver

“The meeting in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 was for the purpose of exercising and receiving the benefits of spiritual gifts. Prophets were exercising their gift of prophecy. ‘The prophets’ wives were instructed to ‘keep silent in the churches.’ They were not permitted to speak [break their silence]. They were to be in subjection. If they would learn anything (with regard to the message coming through the husband/prophet) they were not to interrupt the prophecy, but were to wait and ask their husbands at home. It was ‘shameful’ for the woman (wife) to speak in that meeting.” From *Contending for the Faith* October/1995, p. 2; Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers OPEN FORUM Freed Hardeman College* Henderson, TN: 1976), pp. 106-109.

Guy N. Woods

“Who were the women required to keep silent in the passage under study (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35)? They were the wives of the prophets considered in the foregoing paragraph (his comments on previous verses). Forbidden to interrupt, or to make inquiry, during the process of revelation, the apostle laid down the very sensible rule that they should wait a more opportune occasion to propound the question; i.e., until they were able to ask their husbands at home. These women were married, they had husbands; their husbands were capable of answering their inquiries at home.” From

Contending for the Faith, October /1995, p. 10; from Roy C Deaver, *The Role of Women* (Wellington, Texas: Copyright, No Date), pp.13-15.

Others

“In world in the early days of the (Roman) Republic women were not even allowed to make suggestions, but by the beginning of the Empire many men were seeking and even following the advice of their wives. It was all right to do so, provided the advice was given in private. The Athenians men considered women not much better than property.” Power rest with the strongest.

Questions

1. Phebe was a *diaconos*, a servant.

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

2. According to 1 Corinthians 14, Christians assemble together for the purpose of

- ☐ Conducting a worship service
- ☐ Encouraging and admonishing one another

Answers to Questions

1. True
2. Encouraging and admonishing one another

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