

The Wives Of Elders And Deacons

Introduction. "Behind every great man is a great woman." This old familiar phrase has as much truth in it today as it did when it was first spoken, and it is especially relevant when applied to the elder and deacon and his work in the church. These men must have encouragement and support from their wives. If she is not behind him, he will have a tough time doing his work.

We often preach about the qualifications of elders and deacons, but we have failed to nurture the need in the minds of our young women the necessity to live up to God's requirements regarding the wives of elders and deacons. Every elder and deacon needs a wife, and we need to do everything we can to help these young women to develop and marry men who can serve in these important positions in the Lord's church. That is why we are going to spend our time today investigating matters surrounding the wives of elders and deacons.

I. **What About Deaconesses?**

- A. Some misunderstand what is stated in 1 Timothy 3:11 so as to authorize women in leadership roles rather than a reference to the wives of elders and deacons. Added to this is the statement in Romans 16:1: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant (diaġkonon) of the church which is at Cenchrea." The footnotes of several versions translate "servant" as "deaconess."
- B. However, no idea of women officers in the church is taught in the New Testament. This is an assumption which needs to be proved.
 1. Epaphras is associated with the church in Colossians and is called a "servant" (diaġkonon) in Colossians 1:7, but no contemporary translation regards him as a deacon.
 2. In 1 Timothy 4:6 Paul calls Timothy a "minister" (diaġkonon); Timothy was associated with the church in Ephesus, but he obviously was not a deacon.
 3. In John 12:26, a faithful Christian is called Christ's servant (diaġkonon). Where would we stop? That which proves too much proves nothing!
- C. A word may sometimes have a dual meaning. The word "elder" is an example. In the general sense it means "one elder," whether man or woman. But in the official sense, it means a ruler or overseer. The same is true of "servant." In the general meaning it implies any service without a special office included. But in the official or limited sense it means an office (or work) of a special nature in the church that carries certain qualifications (cf. Philippians 4:3). Women may do many tasks,

even under the direction of the elders, but that does not constitute a position in the church in the same sense of elders and deacons.

II. ***The Qualifications Of The Wives Of Elders And Deacons***

- A. There are certain qualifications that the wives of the elders and deacons must possess before their husbands can be qualified to serve in the office.
- B. There are several erroneous attitudes toward qualifications.
 - 1. All the Bible qualifications are for the group of wives rather than for one woman.
 - a) The origin of this attitude was an attempt to escape some essential quality mentioned in the scriptures to allow some esteemed man to enter the eldership.
 - b) The language of the apostle to Timothy tells us that these qualities are for one man and his wife.
 - 2. All qualifications are flexible and not absolute.
 - a) This idea weakens the standard of God to the extent that the range from side to side is so broad that almost any sort of wife may be acceptable as the wife of an elder or deacon.
 - b) When pushing this idea, some questions come to mind that must be answered. Just how flexible are the qualifications for the wives? How far will they stretch or shrink? Who is permitted to do the stretching or shrinking?
 - 3. Appointing the man regardless of his wife's qualifications.
 - a) This plainly disregards the authority of Christ for He gave specific instructions regarding her qualifications.
 - b) If a man is disqualified because of his wife, God will not lower His standard just to accommodate her.
- C. The proper attitude toward the qualifications of wives.
 - 1. The qualifications do not demand a perfect, sinless woman.
 - a) All of God's standards are perfect; in fact, all that relates to God is perfect. There are no perfect Christians who do not need the cleansing blood of Christ, therefore there are no perfect women who are the wives of elders and deacons.
 - b) Every elder's and deacon's wife must have all the qualifications to a high degree, but to argue that they must be perfect is holding them to a higher standard than other Christians.
 - 2. All of the qualifications are essential.
 - a) It takes all the qualifications of wives to make an elder's and deacon's wife, just like it takes all the qualifications of a Christian to make a Christian.
 - b) The fact that some of them may be difficult does not nullify these qualifications. They are not expedients, preferences, or

options; that is, take what we prefer and leave off what we oppose.

3. The qualifications must be developed before the appointment.
 - a) The office of an elder or a deacon is not for the purpose of developing the qualities, but because they and their wives have developed the qualifications, the men can perform the work.
 - b) The New Testament tells us that men and their wives who were considered for these positions must first be "proved" (1 Timothy 3:10).
- D. The elders and deacons of the church must have good wives who possess four important qualities.
 1. Grave.
 - a) The word here means the same as with reference to the elders and deacons. It means to be prudent, appropriate, dignified, quiet, of sound judgment; not giddy. This can especially be shown by her dress (1 Timothy 2:9-10). Some versions translate the word "worthy of respect.
 - b) A grave person is not one that is severe, stern, or unhappy. She is admired by all. The wives of elders and deacons must not be foolish, unconcerned, and indifferent to the work of their husbands, but instead serious about its progress and a good helper and companion.
 2. Not slanderers.
 - a) No form of slandering is pleasing to God. Wives of elders and deacons, as well as all Christians, must be able to control their tongue and not be busybodies or tale-bearers of idle gossip.
 - b) The wives of elders and deacons may at times know sensitive information about members of the congregation and one can image the kind of damage that it would do if it was told to members of the congregation.
 - c) Backbiters and talebearers are dangerous both to themselves and to the church (Proverbs 18:8; 26:20). No wife of an elder or deacon has any business being involved in this sin (Romans 1:29-30; 2 Corinthians 12:20).
 3. Sober.
 - a) This word means the same as with reference to the elders and deacons. The wives of these men must be temperate, self-controlled, and self-possessed (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). They must "hold themselves in" and not be frivolous and irresponsible.
 - b) A lack of soberness on the part of the wives will be a bad influence upon their husbands, their children, and their congregation.

4. Faithful in all things.
 - a) The wives of elders and deacons must be faithful to God in all relations as a Christian. She must be faithful in worship; faithful in Christian living; faithful to her husband; faithful to her children; and faithful to all others in the church.
 - b) A faithful wife can be a great blessing to an elder or deacon. Individuals like Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:17), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), Onesimus (Colossians 4:9), Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12), and Antipas (Revelation 2:13) all give us an idea of how faithful wives need to act.

Conclusion. It is certainly true that a virtuous woman's price is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10). An elder or deacon who has a good wife has a great asset to his work (Proverbs 18:22). Let's encourage our young ladies to develop into the kind of women God wants for the wives of elders and deacons. Let's encourage them to help their husbands, as best they can, develop into the kind of men God wants for His church.

Furthermore, let's not discourage and place a stumbling block in the way of the women who currently are the wives of elders and deacons. Elders and deacons have time-consuming tasks. Let's be an easy flock to shepherd in every way and not take inordinate amounts of time away from them and their families. This will help build up the Lord's cause for future generations of Christians.