

As we move into the 21 Century it's vitally important that we consider the role of women in ministry. Covenant Life has always considered women's ministry vital to the health and growth of the local church. The word of God has some interesting things to say that the wife of a deacon or elder can't overlook when considering serving beside her husband or as a ministry leader.

Pastors and church leaders often look meticulously at the lives of the men being considered for the work of the eldership, but fail to look carefully at their wives. Many congregations have come to rue the day they made this mistake. It is one that can be avoided by looking carefully at the directions the apostle Paul gave in *1 Timothy 3:11*. There Paul wrote, "*Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.*"

This passage often is ignored with respect to elders because it is situated in the midst of the continued instructions concerning the deacons' qualifications. So, some have assumed it refers only to deacons' wives. Such a conclusion is both unlikely and illogical.

Note that the word *their* has been added to the English text in an effort to clarify. It is useful if we see it in the context of the qualifications of both elders and deacons, somewhat confusing if viewed only in regard to deacons. All Christian wives should seek to achieve these attitudes and behaviors, but Paul said the wives of elders and deacons are required to possess them. Thus, indirectly, their behavior and attitude constitute yet another qualification for a man who would serve in either capacity.

It doesn't make sense to assume that this divinely ordained requirement applies only to the wives of deacons. The example set by an elder and his family relationship is all the more crucial in leading, correcting, and overseeing God's local flock.

In previous articles we've examined the importance of an deacon demonstrating, in the context of his family, the ability to lead, rule, and guide. As we usually focus on his ability to exercise authority over his children, it also is important that we explore how he has done with respect to leading his wife.

It is one thing to authoritatively direct one's children, who are children. It is another matter to examine how a man has performed in choosing a godly mate, exercising loving leadership, and creating an environment for godliness. As it will be in leading a congregation, so it is in leading a wife. It isn't accomplished solely by issuing commands.

And, without considering the husband's direct role, it will be important that the deacon's wife be a true *helper* with his work.

The Biblical Role Of An Deacon Wife

She might or might not be performing the same function as the deacon, but she may necessarily be privy to much of that with which the elder will be dealing. So, we certainly can see why she should not be a malicious gossip.

The deacon's work is sometimes enormous. He needs a companion who is as dedicated to the cause of the Lord as he is.

She Can't Be Indifferent to Her Duties

She is to be "*grave*" (KJV), "*reverent*" (NKJV), or "*serious*" (NRSV). These words suggest a person who is prudent, dignified, quiet, of sound judgment, and not giddy. The jobs of wife, mother, and Christian all require a certain seriousness.

This doesn't imply that such a woman can't enjoy a joke or possess a sense of humor, but it does clearly assert that she must not be foolish or indifferent toward any of her responsibilities.

Fulfillment of this requirement is reflected in her language, dress, and manners.

She Must Control Her Tongue

An elder's wife can't be a woman who is a "*slanderer*." *W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says of the word used here, "accusing falsely ... in *1 Timothy 3:11*, where the reference is to those who are given to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others, and spreading their innuendos and criticisms in the church."

Women, or men, with such a weakness wreak havoc in any church. How much more so a woman whose husband is an elder, who may know more about the spiritual problems of some members than other women, and who, along with her husband, is being looked to as an example of Christ-like living?

If deacon's may very well be working regularly with brethren who have weaknesses, who are involved in sins that need to be privately admonished in the teaching phase of an overall process of positive discipline.

Just imagine how such efforts will be turned completely upside down and damaged by slanders, inappropriate and ill-timed criticisms, and the like.

Deacons' wives are not to consider themselves as church officers but they are "*one flesh*" with the men who they stand beside. So, the sinful conduct of such a wife won't stand alone, at least as regarding its impact.

Wives Need to Use Self-Control

The King James Version uses the word "*sober*," and the New King James the word "*temperate*" to describe an approach to life that is discreet, chaste, moderate, in control of oneself, and able to curb one's desires and impulses. Interestingly, this is the exact same qualification required of their husbands, who serve as elders (*1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8*).

Deacons / elders, by reason of age, likely will have wives who are *older* as well. So, this makes Paul's admonition in *Titus 2:3-5* fitting here also. He wrote, "*The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.*"

That makes it demonstrably clear that an elder's wife, as an older woman, certainly has an active, though authoritatively subordinate, role in the work of the local church. Her example, like that of her husband, will be observed and used as a model. And that being the case, she must be sober or temperate in her life.

She Must Be Faithful in All Things

This, of a certainty, is a broad-ranging qualification. It covers:

1. Faithfulness to the Lord in behavior, worship, and teaching; and
2. Faithfulness to her husband, morally, as a suitable helper, in obedience, and sometimes in the care of children still at home.

At the risk of being redundant, it is worth emphasizing again that God expects all women to be faithful in all things. But if a woman is still *working on* achieving this, she isn't yet the woman that an elder must have to be able to do his work effectively.

Need for Such Women Most Critical Today

God did not create man to be alone. He needs help. At times, being an elder is hard, strenuous work. He needs support. He can't effectively do his work if his own wife is one of his greatest problems. Sometimes, after discussions, studies, confrontations, and meetings, he will come home quite stressed. He critically needs a woman who understands that stress, who can help him avoid becoming discouraged by failures and setbacks, and who helps in whatever way she can.

An deacon / elder is to be hospitable. It may not be impossible for an elder to be hospitable without his wife's assistance, but it certainly would be difficult.

The Biblical Role Of An Deacon Wife

Women who don't possess the qualifications here studied will serve their husbands poorly when their husbands must be away for many hours helping others, when they agonize over souls, and when they must confront challenges and opposition to the truth and be unpopular in so doing.