

## Doctrine of Deaconess'

### Romans 16:1

1. The only official offices clearly established in the *New Testament* is that of apostle, elder, and deacon.
2. It does seem that some women were recognized as deaconess in some sense by the early church, based on the testimony of *Scripture*, and church history.
3. Certainly the term and concept of deaconess is applied to some women in the early church, and on this point no Greek scholar would disagree.
4. For example in the local church established by Paul in Cenchreae (sen'-kre-e) a seaport of Corinth on the eastern side of the isthmus, a lady by the name of Phoebe is called the deaconess of Cenchreae. She was entrusted with the *Epistle to the Romans*, and was commended to the Romans in the highest terms by the apostle, who charged them to "*assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need*" (*Romans 16:1-2*).
  - *Romans 16:1 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.*
5. The word "servant" here in Romans 16:1 is *diakonon*, (noun, feminine, singular, accusative) *diakonos* (dee-ak'-on-os); probably from an obsolete *diako* (to run on errands); an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); specially, a Christian teacher and pastor (technically, a deacon or deaconess): Translated in the KJV - deacon, minister, servant (*New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*).
6. While it is true the term *diakonon* can be translated as masculine, Vincent notes the following on Romans 16:1.

Servant *diakonon* (NT: 1249). The word may be either masculine *or* feminine. Commonly explained as "*deaconess*." However, [he notes] the term *diakonissa* "*deaconess*" is found only in ecclesiastical Greek.

[But then he goes on to say] the office seems to have been confined mainly to widows, though virgins were not absolutely excluded.

Their duties were to take care of the sick and poor, to minister to martyrs and confessors in prison, to instruct catechumens, to assist at the baptism of women, and to exercise a general supervision over the female church members. Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persia (Rom 16:12) may have belonged to this class. See the note at 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

7. As far as the historical record goes, an appeal can be made to the "*Apostolical Constitutions*", a collection of ecclesiastical prescripts in eight books, containing doctrinal, liturgical, and moral instructions, and dating from the third, or possibly from the close of the second, century.
8. The deaconess' were distinguished from widows and virgins. Their duties were prescribed and as well as a form for their ordination.
9. Pliny the younger, about A.D. 104 AD, appears to refer to them in his letter to Trajan, in which he speaks of the torture of two maids who were called "*ministrae*" (female ministers).
10. Further appeal for historical evidence of the early church recognizing deaconess' is found in Schaff's "*Apostolic Church*," and Bingham's "*Christian Antiquities*."
11. Perhaps the Lord wants to stretch the comfort level of Christians sometimes so he sends along a Corrie Ten Boom to speak (preach?) to millions through the Billy Graham organization and other venues or He raises up a Lottie Moon who taught men, established churches and engaged in personal evangelism – despite the protests of the men of her generation.
12. While these women may be exceptions to the rule – like the warrior Deborah in the *Old Testament* era the church must be careful not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit.
13. Since this issue has become controversial in some circles the better part of prudence, if ministering in those circles, is not to make an issue of it knowing that godly women will serve the Lord even if the church does not give them a "*title*".
14. In this generation, it is better to pass out towels, not titles, to avoid terms that create more heat than light.
15. However, in eternity, it is possible the Lord will say, "*You **could** have called some of the women deaconesses. I did.*"