

2026
Believe
What's Greater

Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

Isaiah 53:1-2 (NKJV)



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Bible Study Lesson: “Female Deacons”

A Biblical Study of the Deacon's Role in the Local Church

Primary Text: Epistle to the Romans 16:1-2

Facilitator: Bishop Tracy L. Boles, D. Min.



Key Truth

Yes—**women can serve as deacons**, and there is solid **biblical, theological, and historical** support for this position. Here's clear, Scripture-anchored support that can be used for teaching and leadership clarity.

Phoebe Is Explicitly Called a Deacon

Epistle to the Romans 16:1

“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a **servant** (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea.”



Key Points:

- The Greek word **διάκονος (diakonos)** is the **same word used for deacons**
- Paul does **not** use a generic term for helper
- Phoebe is formally **commended** and **trusted** with carrying Paul's letter to Rome

This is the strongest New Testament evidence of a **woman serving in the diaconal office.**



What Acts 6 Actually Says

In Acts of the Apostles 6:3, the apostles say:

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you **seven men** of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...”

The Greek word translated “**men**” here is:

ἄνδρας (andras)

Plural of **ἄνῆρ (anēr)** = *adult male*

So yes—**Acts 6 does explicitly say “men.”**

That point should not be ignored, softened, or explained away.



So How Can Women Serving as Deacons Still Be Biblically Defensible?

The answer comes from **how Scripture works as a whole**, not from denying Acts 6.

Here are four key clarifications that hold Acts 6 in full integrity.



1. Acts 6 Describes a Historical Moment, Not a Universal Limitation

Acts 6 tells us:

- Who was chosen
- In Jerusalem
- At that moment
- To solve that specific problem

It does **not** say:

- “Only men may ever serve as deacons”
- “This office is permanently male-only”



Important distinction:

Many things in Acts are descriptive:

- All apostles were Jewish men
- Leaders met in homes
- There were only 7 deacons

Yet the church does not treat all of those as universal rules.

2. The Cultural Reality of Acts 6 Matters

First-century Jerusalem was:

- Patriarchal
- Public leadership was overwhelmingly male
- Widows (the recipients) were female—but leadership addressing public distribution was male



Choosing **men** in that context:

- Avoided cultural confusion
- Ensured public legitimacy
- Allowed the ministry to function without distraction

The choice of men fits the culture—but the qualifications transcend the culture.

3. Later Scripture Expands the Application

Scripture interprets Scripture.

After Acts 6:

- **Romans 16:1** calls Phoebe a **διάκονος (diakonos)** of the church



Key theological point:

Acts 6 shows the birth of the function; later epistles clarify the scope of the office.

This is how doctrine develops throughout the New Testament:

- Gospels → Acts (practice)
- Epistles → interpretation and regulation

4. The New Testament Never says “Men Only” for Deacons



When Paul later formalizes deacon qualifications in **1 Timothy 3:**

- He does **not** say “men only”
- He includes a separate category for **women**
- He emphasizes **character**, not gender

If male-only deacons were essential doctrine:

- Paul would have said so explicitly
- Especially when clarifying church order



Putting It All Together (This Is the Key)

You can hold **both truths** without contradiction:

✓ **Truth #1**

Acts 6 involved seven men—historically, textually, and plainly.

✓ **Truth #2**

The New Testament does not teach that only men may ever serve as deacons.

Acts 6 gives us the **prototype**.



A Helpful Teaching Analogy

- Jesus chose **12 Jewish male apostles**
- Yet Gentiles and women are full gospel ministers
 - Acts 6 chose **seven men**
- Yet later Scripture affirms women serving as deacons



A Balanced Teaching Statement

“Acts 6 records that seven men were chosen to address a specific need in a specific cultural context. While the text must be honored as written, the broader New Testament witness shows that deacon ministry is defined by character and service, not permanently restricted by gender.”

Final Word

Some churches will still conclude:

- “We affirm male-only deacons based on Acts 6”

Others will conclude:

- “We affirm qualified men and women as deacons based on the whole New Testament”