

Qualifications of Deacons

By Mark Mayberry

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1 Timothy 3:11 ... 11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. (KJV)

1 Timothy 3:11 ... 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. (NKJV)

1 Timothy 3:11 ... 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. (NASB)

Even so must their wives (KJV); Likewise, their wives (NKJV); Women must likewise (NASB)

The Greek word *gunē*, here translated “wives” (KJV & NKJV) or “women” (NASB), occurs over 200x in the NT. Thomas says it refers to “a woman” [1135]. BDAG offers the following meanings: “(1) an adult female person, woman (virgins are included); (2) a married woman, wife; (3) a newly married woman, bride, to be considered in some contexts.”

Modern English translations differ: The KJV, NKJV, NIV and ESV read “their wives...” while the ASV, NASB, RSV, and NRSV render it “women...” The NASB Marginal Note says, “i.e. either deacons’ wives or deaconesses.” Recognizing that context determines meaning, we understand the language of 1st Timothy 3:11 describes the wives of elders and deacons.

Be grave (KJV); Be reverent (NKJV); Be dignified (NASB)

The Greek word *semnos*, here translated “grave” (KJV), “reverent” (NKJV), or “dignified” (NASB), occurs 4x in the NT (Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2). As noted earlier, BDAG say it pertains to “to evoking special respect; (1) of living entities; (a) human beings worthy of respect/honor, noble, dignified, serious; (b) transcendent beings worthy of reverence, august, sublime, holy (extra-Biblical examples); (2) of characteristics, states of being, and things honorable, worthy, venerable, holy, above reproach.”

A related word, *semnotēs*, occurs 3x in the NT (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:4; Titus 2:7). Thomas says it describes “seriousness” [4587]. BDAG defines it as “a manner or mode of behavior that indicates one is above what is ordinary and therefore worthy of special respect; (a) of a human being dignity, seriousness, probity, holiness=Lat. Gravitas; (b) of a deity holiness.”

Accordingly, this quality is required of disciples in general (1 Tim. 2:2 Phil. 4:8), elders/overseers (1 Tim. 3:4), deacons (1 Tim. 3:8), their wives (1 Tim. 3:11), older men (Titus 2:2), and evangelists (Titus 2:7).

Not slanderers (KJV & NKJV); Not malicious gossips (NASB)

The Greek word *diabolos*, here translated “slanderers” (KJV & NKJV) or “malicious gossips” (NASB), frequently refers to the devil himself. Thomas defines it as “slandorous, accusing falsely” [1228]. BDAG say it “(1) pertains to engagement in slander, slanderous; (2) substantively, one who engages in slander.” Frequently it refers to Satan (1 Tim. 3:6, 7; 2 Tim. 2:26); occasionally it is used of men and women (1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3).

Many passages warn against the sin of gossip and slander (Prov. 10:18; 16:28; 20:19; Rom. 1:28-31; 2 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:31-32; 1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:3-5).

Sober (KJV); Temperate (NKJV & NASB)

The Greek word *nēphalios*, translated “sober” (KJV) or “temperate” (NKJV & NASB), occurs 3x in the NT (1 Tim. 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2). Thomas defines it as “sober” [3524]. BDAG say it “(1) pertains to being very moderate in the drinking of an alcoholic beverage, temperate, sober. For prohibition of strong drink to priests when engaging in official duties see Leviticus 10:8-11; (2) pertains to being restrained in conduct, self-controlled, level-headed figurative extension of 1.”

According to Moulton & Milligan, an ancient extra-Biblical text uses this word, whose meaning “may refer either to altars at which only wineless offerings were made, or perhaps to cakes made in the form of an altar, free from all infusion of wine” [G3524].

A related word, *nēphō*, occurs 6x in the NT (1 Thess. 5:6, 8; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), and means “to be sober” or “to abstain from wine” [Thomas 3525].

Faithful in all things (KJV, NKJV & NASB)

The Greek word *pistos*, occurring 67x in the NT, refers to one who is “faithful, reliable” [Thomas 4103]. BDAG define this adjective as “(1) pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith, pass. aspect of *pisteuō*; (a) of persons; of human beings (and Christ); of God as the One in whom we can have full confidence; (b) of things, esp. of words; (2) pertaining to being trusting, trusting, cherishing faith/trust act. aspect of *pisteuō*.”

Faithfulness is required of disciples in general (Luke 12:42-44; 16:10-13), and teachers in particular (1 Tim. 1:12-13; 2 Tim. 2:1-4). It is reflected in the lives of Christian women, such as Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) and the wives of elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:11).