

The Keys Of The Kingdom

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Published By: J.F. Miller
Editors: J.F. Miller & C.B. Frock, Jr.

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Our Writing Staff



Jim Miller

Jim Miller: Preacher semi -retired, publisher, writer, editor. A member of the Lords church since 1985. Preached in NC, TN, Ky, and Maine. Two years hosting Bible Talk Radio in Livingston, TN,. Fill in preacher and member at Kittery, Maine church of Christ. Owner of Keys Of The Kingdom magazine and website.



Tim Bench

Tim Bench: Member at Hillcrest Church of Christ, Abilene TX. 1990 graduate of Abilene Christian University. Speaker, teacher at numerous churches in and around Abilene and West Texas.



Logan Summers

Logan Summers is a graduate of the Florida School of Preaching, and has preached for congregations in Florida, Illinois, and Texas. He is a member of the Westside church of Christ in Midland, Texas.



Cloyd Frock

Cloyd “Ben” Frock, Jr. is the preacher for Parsons church of Christ in Parsons, Kansas. He is a graduate of the Florida School of Preaching, and has preached full-time for the past five years in Florida and Kansas. Prior to preaching he worked eighteen years in civil service as a Police Crime Scene Technician (11 years), and as a Business Analyst (7 years). He and his wife, Elisha, have three children.



Robert Alexander

Robert Alexander: Married to Susan (Hall) Alexander. Two sons: Robby and Liam. 2005 graduate of the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies. Have preached for congregations in TN and AL as well. Past director and editor of the annual Summitville church of Christ lectureship (2007-2008). Currently preaching for the College Ave. congregation in DeFuniak Springs, Florida.



Scott Crawford

Scott Crawford: Currently a member at the Roebuck Parkway church of Christ in Birmingham, AL; preaching part-time for the Montevallo church of Christ in Montevallo, AL. Married to Kathy L. (Joynes) Crawford of Elkton, KY for 25 years with 2 children: Attended Harding University from '85 to '89 with concentrations in Psychology, Music, Bible Studies. Currently working on a Master's Degree in Theology through the Trinity Collage of the Bible and Theological Seminary.



Doug Post

Doug Post: Has been in full time ministry for 15 years, preaching in Indiana and Connecticut. Received his BA in Communications, UCONN; MA in Biblical Studies, Southern Christian University; New Testament Theology and New Testament Greek, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Theological University of America. Doug is married to Debbie, his wife of 22 years.

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What is the Gift of the Holy Spirit (Part 4)

Doug Post

Vernon, Connecticut

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ACTS 2 (Continued from last month).

“For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence. 29 “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 34 “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’ 36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:25-36).¹

The overall thrust of Peter's sermon is to prove from the O.T. Scriptures, in light of Christ's work in their presence, that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, being appointed Lord and Christ over His kingdom. As a result, the promise of the Holy Spirit was poured out, the promise of which being miraculous gifts. The promise of the Holy Spirit was that which would come “OUT FROM” the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17-18), which was the bestowal of miraculous power. This is in reference, therefore, to the GIFTS (miraculous power) and not the GIVER (Holy Spirit). The use of “Metonymy,” a figure of speech whereby one word or thing is used in place of another word or thing, or

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

where a word or thing is used as a representative of another word or thing. For instance, when Jesus took the cup and blessed it, He passed it to the disciples so they could “divide” it (Lk. 22:17); He was not referring to the literal “cup,” but to the contents in the cup: the fruit of the vine. Sometimes Paul used the term “Christ,” not as the “Person of Christ,” but as that which represented His teaching – what He taught: “*But you have not so learned Christ*” (Eph. 4:20-24). The term “*oldness of the letter*” refers to the Old Covenant Law of Moses, while the phrase, “*newness of the Spirit*” refers to the New Covenant Law of Christ (Rom. 7:6). The two terms or phrases are synonymous, but they stand in place of the other terms they represent. Paul uses the term “un-circumcision” to represent the Gentiles, while the term “circumcision” represented the Jews (Eph. 2:11-12). In comparing and contrasting the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, Paul calls the Old Covenant “*the letter*” and the New Covenant “*the Spirit*” (2 Cor. 3:6). The New Testament is replete with the use of metonymy.

The text tells us that those who gathered on Pentecost could “*see and hear.*” What did they see and hear? We know they did not see the Holy Spirit, because no one can see a spirit. Rather, what they saw and heard were the effects of the Holy Spirit – His miraculous manifestations. Peter’s sermon, therefore, interprets the phenomenon of Pentecost, along with the promise of Joel, in a “Christocentric” manner. Peter’s sermon can be divided into three sections, which all point to Peter’s Christological conclusion in v. 36: “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*”

In Acts 2:14-21, Peter defends the Pentecost phenomena as the beginning of the unfolding of Joel's prophecy in the last days (cf. Joel 2:28-32). In 2:22-32, Peter argues for the resurrection of Jesus the Nazarene as anticipated in Psalm 16:8-11. The argument for the exaltation of Christ, as foreseen in Psalm 110:1, following His death and resurrection, was being applied to the Lord and Christ (v. 36).

Another point to consider here is that Christ is presented as reigning and ruling over His kingdom, being seated at the right hand of the Father. It must be remembered that while Jesus came to seek and save the lost, their salvation would depend upon the Christ establishing His kingdom/church. The bulk of His teaching, therefore, concerned His pending kingdom. The very fact that Peter presents Christ as ruling over His kingdom should bring to mind that Christ is Head of His church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The words “church” and “kingdom” are used interchangeably (Mt. 16:18-19). The very fact that Peter speaks of the kingdom/church, reveals to us that we, too, need to teach the

fundamentals of the church/kingdom when teaching potential converts. After all, the kingdom is part of the gospel (Mt. 4:23) needing to be preached (Acts 8:12). It is the location where converts are translated into (Col. 1:13), the place of the saved (Eph. 5:23; cf. Acts 2:47). Moreover, Christ is presented at the right hand of the Father (2:33), implying His rule over His kingdom. We know this is true since Christ was glorified after His ascension (Lk. 24:26; Jn. 17:1, 5; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:21; Heb. 2:9). Preaching the kingdom/church, therefore, is essential when teaching and making disciples (Mt. 28:19-20). Certainly, Christ, as Head over His body must be taught, because all need to learn that we must be baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), and if baptized into one body, then baptized into Christ, where salvation is located (2 Tim. 2:10; Eph. 5:23; cf. Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:1-4). Since Christ, as Head over His body, is to be taught, then it goes without saying that His body needs to be taught. It wouldn't make any sense to preach the Head, and not the body. This would make a decapitated Head (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Eph. 4:4; Mt. 16:18-19). Since the authority of Christ must be known, which includes His "Headship," then we need to know the extent of His authority, which includes His kingdom, the church.

The salvation of which Joel speaks in Acts 2:20; 2:38 refers to Christ, as well as the promised miraculous power from the Spirit (Acts 2:33; cf. 2:17-18, 39).

The image shows a screenshot of the Churches of Christ website. At the top, the logo "Churches of Christ.com" is displayed in white text on a dark blue background. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "Home", "Work of the Spring Congregation", "Recommended Links", and "Contact Us". Underneath the navigation menu are several smaller links: "Sermons", "Articles", "Debates", "Spring CFTF Lectures", and "World Wide Gospel Preaching". The main content area features a red and white banner for "Contending FOR THE Faith". Below this banner, the text reads: "2014 Spring Contending For The Faith Lectures 'WHAT MUST A CHRISTIAN DO TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST?'" followed by "February 19—February 23, 2014" and "David P. Brown, Lectureship Director". At the bottom of the banner, there is a blue link that says "Click Here Watch The Lectures".

The First Principles (Part 6)

Conversion

Jim Miller

Gray, Maine

Last month we looked at sin as part of the first principles; now we want to look at what must be done about it. This can best be called conversion.

There are things we can do to escape sin and its consequences. God Has made a way for this and has done His part. There are two sides to conversion/salvation: a divine side, and a human side. Let us look at the divine side first:

God has already done all that is necessary to make salvation available to all.

1. God gave us His Son. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (Jn. 3:16).¹
2. God has bestowed His grace upon us. Paul told Titus, *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men”* (Tit. 2:11). God has bestowed His divine favor upon men, making salvation possible.
3. Christ did His part in the shedding of His blood, *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace”* (Eph. 1:7). It was God’s love for man that He sent His son to die for sinners. *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom. 5:8).
4. Revealed truth was given via the Holy Spirit. Paul said, *“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words; whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit* (Eph. 3:3-5). The Hebrew writer tells us that *“God hath spoken unto us by his Son....”* (Heb. 1:1-2); we need to listen.

There is the divine side, as laid out in the Scriptures; so, what we must do?

Most people profess to be religious in some form or another, but their concept of conversion is not that which the Bible prescribes. Nonetheless, they believe that they believe that they have been converted according to Scriptural requirements. They fail to see that Bible conversion is quite different than what many people assume it to be. Bible conversion is the process by which one ceases to be a

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

sinner, guilty of his sin, and by which, having received the forgiveness of sins, is added to the church. True conversion is necessary to go to heaven. One who is not converted in the way the Bible teaches is not converted at all.

In Acts 3:19, Peter said, *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord...”* Another statement, teaching the same thing, is recorded in Acts 2:38, when Peter, the very same spokesman, commanded the Jews to *“...repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* So we see that Bible conversion consists of obedience to certain commandments, and this conversion is essential to receiving salvation.

One of the commands all individuals must obey to receive the remission of sins, in order to be converted, is the command to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Many passages in the New Testament emphasize this necessity. Almost everyone will tell you that one must be a believer in order to be converted. In John 8:24, Jesus said, *“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”* John, when stating his purpose in writing the Gospel that bears his name, said that belief is necessary to eternal life. He said, *“Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name”* (Jn. 20:30, 31). Belief, therefore, is essential in one’s conversion. You cannot be changed in harmony with the Scriptures unless you are a believer.

Jesus said, *“For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins...”* (Jn. 8:24). Some teach that man is saved by faith alone, but the New Testament does not teach that faith, or anything else by itself, will save us. James said, *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”* (Jas. 2:24). Man cannot please God without faith (Heb. 11:6).

If it takes more than faith/belief for true conversion, what else is necessary? Change of heart is not enough. There are other commandments that must be followed by the unbeliever for conversion/salvation to take place. For one to be converted, Scripturally, he must be more than just a believer. It is not enough to change only the affections of the heart. Another change is logically implied, and divinely commanded following one’s belief. All men are commanded to repent of their sins. In Luke 13:3, Jesus said, *“I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish.”* We can clearly see that it is a matter of “repent

or perish.” Peter commanded a group of believing Jews who were present on the day of Pentecost to “*repent ye and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38). We can see they had to comply (repent) in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus connected repentance with the remission of sins in the “Great Commission.” Before He ascended back to the Father, Jesus said, “*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem*” (Lk. 24:46-47). Now we can see that the Scriptures teach that repentance is also a commanded necessary to be converted to Christ. “*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30). An example of repentance can be found in Matthew 21:28-31. In regard to working, one boy said, “*I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.*” What did he do when he repented? He changed his mind. Repentance, therefore, is a change of one’s mind that results in a change of action or life.

We will stop here for now; next month we will finish looking at conversion as explained in Gods word. I hope you are enjoying learning these first principles, or being reminded of them if you are already a Christian. Please continue to study with us so you can share the Gospel with those you meet. Till next month, may God bless you.

SEARCHING FOR TRUTH

Truth is a most precious thing.

In our world, everyone is searching for something. If you are searching for answers to questions regarding God, Jesus, hope, happiness, faith, life after death, good and evil, the church, the Bible, God's plan for you, or Jesus' love for you, the answers to these can be found in this series of programs.

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Three Simple Ways to Improve Your Bible Study

Logan Summers

Midland, Texas

Good habits do not come by accident. They must be formed over time by careful decision making and actions that follow through with the decision. Once those good habits form, the hardest part is done. In order to maintain or improve on those habits, however, a pro-active approach is necessary. Below are some simple pro-active ways to improve your personal Bible study habits and dig deeper into God's Word:

Schedule Your Time

Set both a specific time and a certain amount of time to study God's Word. Without a set time, our study habits cannot form properly and we will be missing out on so much of God's Word. A set time during the day or week will allow us to arrange our schedules accordingly, minimize distractions, and focus clearly on the study. When David spoke of meditating on God's Word day and night, did it come about as a result of randomly stumbling on moments during the day when he found some free time, or was he purposeful in his focus on God's Word (Ps. 1; 119)? Does this mean we cannot study God's Word when we find a few extra minutes in the day? Absolutely not! Any time we have the opportunity is a wonderful time to peer into the Bible, but when the only study we get is when stuck in traffic or during the commercial break, there is something missing from our Bible study. Schedule a time to meet with God about His Word.

Pay Attention to Context

There is a growing danger to treat the Bible like a reference book and not read it for what it is worth. We get so caught up in proving this doctrine or that doctrine that we never look at what is going on around the verses to which we turn. Let us be clear: There is NOTHING wrong with proving what the Bible teaches; it is, in fact, necessary to know what the Bible does teach (Mt. 4:1-10; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Thes. 5:21). How much Bible truth are we missing out on, however, when we only look for the bare minimum? Take James 2:14-26 for example. We often use this passage to teach that faith without works is dead, in order to combat the false doctrine which teaches that the only thing one needs in order to be saved is faith, alone. Is that ALL we can get from this passage? What about the characteristics

of those who have Biblical faith? Diving deeper into this passage reveals that true Biblical faith cares (2:15-16); faith is co-dependent (2:17); active/visible (2:18-19); and multifaceted (2:19). What else can we learn about faith in the comparison of the “father of the faith,” and a woman who is known as “the harlot” (2:20-26)? Try digging a little deeper to see what can be learned, because it is a fascinating study! One side note before we leave this point: If someone claims a doctrine that is not true to Biblical teaching, before jumping to other verses that disprove the false doctrine, try to show from the context why what they are teaching is not what the Bible teaches from the passage that the person is misusing (2 Tim. 2:15). Then, utilize other verses to further demonstrate the validity of the truth and the inconsistency of the error. Doing this will force you to learn the text better, and to dig deeper into the Scriptures.

Ask Good Questions

It is amazing how much more we can get from the text just by asking some good questions when digging into it. A simple start would be by asking questions, such as, “who, when, where, what, and why?” Writing down everyone involved in the text, their actions, beliefs, reactions, emotions, etc. Looking at what is being discussed, find out where it is taking place, and at what time in history. Timothy was trained in the Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Do you suppose he knew the *who, when where, what, and why* of the Old Testament? From there, some other questions can help us to dig deeper and learn more about God through His Word:

1. What does this text say about Christ?
2. The grace of God?
3. His love and mercy?
4. His power?

When we spend the time to ask good questions, the return is immense. We have the opportunity to learn more about God and grow closer to Him.

It is my prayer that these suggestions will be a blessing to you in your personal Bible study. Scheduling your time, understanding context, and asking the right questions will help you begin studying God's Word on a deeper level. May your study be God-glorifying and bring you closer to Christ!

Biblical Exegesis (Part 3)

Robert Alexander

DeFuniak Springs, Florida

Having considered the definition of exegesis, and its direct opposite, eisegesis, along with its consequences, we now turn our attention to a study of the proper disposition necessary for accomplishing Biblical exegesis, and helpful “tools” for accomplishing the task.

The Dispositions Needed to Engage in Biblical Exegesis

In order to properly engage in exegetical study, it is essential that the student of God’s word possess the proper dispositions towards the word of God and towards exegetical study.

1. The student must have the disposition that the word of God can be understood correctly. Many are those who believe and teach the lie that we cannot all understand the Bible alike. If this is the case, then Christ lied when He said that “*ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free*” (Jn. 8:32).¹ Christ is God (Jn. 1:1-4), the 2nd person of the Godhead, and God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Christ, therefore, did not lie when He made the statement recorded in John 8:32. We must have the same attitude that Christ had, which was that we can come to know the truth of what the Bible has to say.
2. The student must love the word of God. Psalm 119 is a tremendous section of Scripture which deals with the Psalmist’s reverence for the word of God (often referred to in this section as God’s law). Four times in this Psalm the Psalmist affirms his love for the law of God (vs. 97, 113, 163, 165). It was because of this love that the Psalmist meditated “*all the day*” on God’s word. A love for the word of God will lead one to make the study of God’s word a constant and consistent practice in his or her life (cf. Mt. 5:6).
3. The student must respect/revere the word of God. The Psalmist had a deep respect and reverence for the word of God. He said that his heart stood in awe of God’s word (Ps. 119:161). Respect and reverence is needed for God’s word because of its divine origin (2 Tim. 3:16), its power to save men (Ps. 19:7; Rom. 1:16; Lk. 8:11), and it’s the standard by which we all will be judged in the last day (Jn. 12:48). Respect and reverence for God and His word leads to obedience and fidelity to God. Further, respect and

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

reverence for God's word will prevent one from seeking to eisegete the Scriptures, rather than exegeting them.

4. The student must be honest. If the student approaches the text with any prejudices or biases, then they will not be able to conduct proper exegesis of the Scriptures. The student must be willing to accept what the Scriptures have to say, rather than what they want them to say. A failure to be honest in dealing with the Scriptures results once more in committing eisegesis (as discussed in last month's article) by "*wresting the scriptures*" (2 Pet. 3:16).
5. The student must be diligent (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). Diligence is taking heed or care in accomplishing a task or tasks. In studying and exegeting God's word, the student must take care that he or she comes to the proper understanding. The student must be diligent in focusing on the text alone, drawing or defending conclusions that can only be proven by the text itself. It is even more important for preachers of the gospel to do so, since a failure to be diligent will result in not handling aright the word of truth, leading to the commission of eisegesis.
6. The student must be committed. It takes commitment to become a Christian. It takes commitment to live life as a Christian. It takes commitment to engage in a proper exegetical study of God's word. One does not just open up the Bible, read the words and expect to immediately understand everything. No, it takes real effort and hard work to properly study and exegete the Scriptures. Just as we use the illustrations of Christ found in Luke 14 regarding the necessity of "*counting the cost*" for what it takes to follow Christ (becoming and living as a Christian), we can also apply these analogies to studying God's word? Are we truly willing to "*pay the price*" regarding what it takes to acquire greater knowledge of God and His will? We demonstrate such willingness when we are truly committed to properly studying and exegeting His divine will for our lives.
7. The student needs to be prayerful regarding the endeavor in which he or she is engaging. As a preacher of the gospel of Christ, I always strive to begin my personal study of God's word, and preparation for writing or preaching, with prayer. Prayer helps focus the mind on the task at hand. Prayer helps to set the stage for study by enabling the one who is praying to see the seriousness and awesomeness of studying God's holy word. When we pray to God as it relates to the study of His will, we must recognize that God does not work directly upon our minds to produce the

knowledge that we desire to gain concerning His will. This false doctrine is known as a “direct operation of the Holy Spirit,” which is espoused by a vast number in the religious world, as well as by some of our very own brethren, today. If the Spirit works directly (separate and apart from the word), then why might we need the word of God at all? God answers prayers for help in coming to understand the meaning of texts by way of His providence. One example might be God's providing of some resource to aid us in our studies, such as books (though uninspired, are helpful as aids), or by coming into contact with those who are more familiar with the subject matter, and who are willing to help teach the student a more in-depth meaning of a text under consideration.

Next month, we will look at how we may engage in Biblical exegesis, and at some helpful resources available to aid our study of the Scriptures.

BASIC BIBLE COURSE



Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth



***Basic Bible Course* – Ira Y. Rice, Jr. Each lesson has been reformatted. This reformatting will allow students to complete the course via the Internet or to download the files to a computer and use them as study guides.**

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Phoebe: A “Deaconess”? (Part 3)

Tim Bench

Abilene, Texas

Introduction and an Opening Word¹

The character, identity, and role of “Phoebe” from the Book of Romans has for many years spawned a plethora of discussions on an array of topics; these typically center around the role(s) that Phoebe, and women in general, filled in the first century church and, subsequently, the roles women are to fill in today’s church, as well. Discussions regarding Phoebe are often specifically centered around the moniker “deaconess,” assigned to her in Romans 16:1 in several translations of the Bible (multiple other translations use differing wording than “deaconess”).

The purpose of this brief study is to analyze specifics on what the New Testament tells us that the role of women within churches is to be; thus, we will attempt to ascertain whether or not “deaconess” is an accurate descriptor for Phoebe. Broader questions for discussion might include the following:

1. Are women allowed, as per New Testament instruction, to hold leadership roles within the modern church (as a “deacon”)?
2. Was Phoebe a female “deacon” in the first century church?
3. Has this term garnered support over the past few years as more and more denominations have allowed women to acquire leadership roles in churches?
4. Where does the term “deaconess” even come from, and is it Biblical?

Scholars, theologians, church historians, and the like are often divided on this issue. Some hold the position that “deaconesses” are authorized in the New Testament, while others argue that it is questionable, and still others suggest that there is no authority in the New Testament for deaconesses. Acceptance of the role of “deaconess” often serves as the basis for an ever-expanding list of “acceptable” roles for women in modern churches; if a woman can serve as a “deaconess,” after all, what would prevent her from serving as an elder, or even

¹ Editor's Note: Due to space limitations, the editors have broken the original manuscript into multiple parts, to be continued monthly until completed. It should be noted, in order to maintain consistency, the editors will reprint the introductory material (Introduction and an Opening Word) prior to each new monthly segment.

preacher?

As with all things, the Scriptures are sufficient to address these questions and to instruct us in righteousness, so that we might be “*furnished completely unto every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).¹ A calm and deliberate study of the Bible on this, or any other issue, will also allow us to avoid all-too-common modern vitriol when discussing gender-based topics, such as those arguing that “restrictions on women serving in the church were only cultural for the times,” or “restrictions on women in churches are just sexist and legalistic.”

The Issue (Continued from Part 2)

Many will suggest that “deaconess” is the correct verbiage or name to be used, and that Phoebe was simply a “female deacon,” without any consideration of what is demanded of a deacon elsewhere in the New Testament. First Timothy 3:8-13 tells us that “*Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*” Those who hold to the view that Phoebe was a “deaconess,” in terms equivalent or comparable to a “deacon,” create a Biblical contradiction, because if Phoebe was a “deaconess,” on the same level as a “deacon,” why would Paul stipulate that a deacon's “wife” be dignified? Likewise, how could Phoebe have been the “husband” of “one wife”? Equating Phoebe as a “deaconess,” therefore, forces parts of the Bible to be null, void, absurd, and utterly useless.

The New Testament offers VERY specific guidelines for “deacons” (see 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9-10). Why, then, are there no specific guidelines, descriptions or qualifications for “deaconesses”? How might we know the selection criteria to be used in choosing a “deaconess”? It be mentioned, again, that simply relying on the qualifications of a “deacon” to fulfill this query effectively serves to negate the entire ideal of the “deaconess.” There is no mention, whatsoever, of “deaconesses” as being either a class, or a distinct group; although “bishops and

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

deacons” are mentioned specifically with the saints at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), the Bible is strangely silent about “deaconesses,” offering no qualifying information concerning such a “role” within the church.

An important comment needs to be emphasized here. In no way is this writer suggesting that women are irrelevant or unimportant to the function of the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. Women’s roles are highlighted in many places in the Bible, such as in Titus 2:3-5: *“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”* Women are to teach and to train young women in appropriate behaviors, and are to provide a solid, Christian example of grace, love, and dignity. Women are a vital and indispensable cog in the church, both in the first century, as well as the 21st century. God’s plan and design for men and for women may differ in some ways, but this in no way indicates that women are worthless or less “important” than their male counterparts. To highlight just a few specific gender differences, God has appointed man to be the head of the family (Eph. 5:23). Man is to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of his wife and children (1 Tim. 5:8; Eph. 6:4). Likewise, women have a special place in God’s plans that men do not have; women are to be helpers to their husbands, teachers of their children and keepers of the home (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:22-24).

There are also Scriptures that deal with a woman’s place in the church, and none seem supportive of the “deaconess” point-of-view. In First Corinthians 11:3, Paul wrote: *“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”* In other words, man has a head to whom he must submit, that being Jesus Christ. Woman has a head to whom she must submit: man. Jesus Christ has a head to whom He must submit: God. Christ is not inferior to God because He submits to Him, nor is woman inferior to man because she submits to him. The place and respective roles that God has appointed for both men and women have nothing to do with inferiority or superiority, but with the purpose for which God created each.

First Timothy 2 deals extensively with a woman’s role in the church. The apostle Paul is speaking of the public worship of the church when it assembles together (1 Tim. 2:1-2; 3:14-15). In verse one Paul commands that prayers be made for all

men. Paul used the word “anthropos” (Strong’s #444), which means “mankind,” a general word for all men and women. Paul again uses this same word in verse four when he says, “*God will have all men to be saved, and come unto a knowledge of the truth.*” In First Timothy 2:8, however, addressing prayer in the church, Paul uses a different word for man, the Greek word “aner” (Strong’s #435). This word is used only to refer to males (man, husband, etc.), thereby commanding only men to lead the public prayers of the church. This, again, highlights the differing roles of men and women established by God. Likewise, women serving as “elders,” increasingly common today, violates direct and specific commands in First Timothy 2:11-12, First Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35, and First Peter 5:1-4.

Then, as now, women worked fervently for the Lord’s church. Philippians 4:3 specifies that certain women “*labored*” with Paul and others “*in the gospel.*” Mary “*bestowed much labor*” (Rom. 16:6). Mary, the mother of John Mark, provided her house “*where many were gathered together praying*” (Acts 12:12). Lydia provided lodging for Paul and his companions (Acts 16:14-15). Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, were Paul’s “*helpers in Christ Jesus,*” and “*provided their house as a meeting place and took Apollos unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly*” They were apparently VERY effective teachers (Rom. 16:3-5; Acts 18:26). We are told in Acts 9:36-39 that Dorcas “*was full of good works and almsdeeds...*” Examples abound of Christ-focused, dedicated, women throughout the New Testament, helping to spread the Gospel via a plethora of means.

As politically incorrect as it may be, the inescapable fact remains: Jesus Christ embraced male leadership in the early church. Without exception, all of the apostles were men. On the other hand, Mary or Martha, as devout and respected as they may have been, were not included as apostles. Without exception, the books of the New Testament were penned by men. There exists no direct, specific Biblical basis for females fulfilling church leadership roles, whether it be elders, preachers, or deacons (deaconesses).

Conclusion

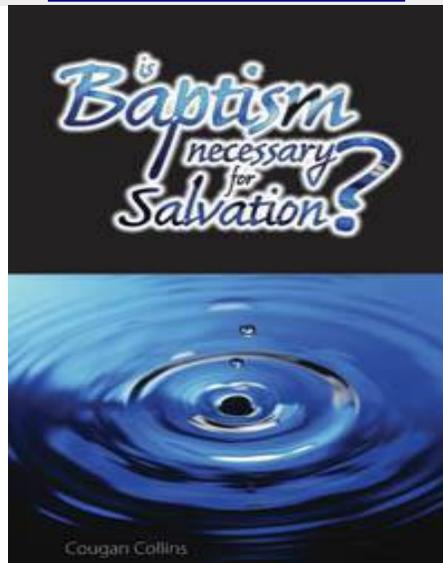
It is this author’s firm belief that “*deaconess*” is an inappropriate and inaccurate term for “*diakonos.*”

1. “Deaconness” appears one time in the entire New Testament, a shockingly low number when considering that “servant,” “minister,” etc. appear numerous times.
2. Applying the official title of “deaconess” to Phoebe, which many people today claim to do, by definition FORCES such adherents to apply the same rules for deacons AND deaconesses from First Timothy 3 – even a cursory read of those verses immediately pose substantial roadblocks, forcing one of two scenarios; either Phoebe was not, and could not have been, an official “deaconess.” Otherwise, the book of First Timothy is rendered to be rubbish.
3. No guidelines, overview, discussion, parameters, or mention of “deaconess” appears in the New Testament, while such specifics concerning “deacons” certainly do exist.

I certainly hope that readers will carefully consider the arguments presented here, and will always study their Bible as an appropriate resource concerning this, and all theological issues. There exists a wide array of areas and methodologies wherein women are not only authorized, but also are expected to contribute to the church today, but serving as “deaconess” is simply not one of those ways.

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Shhhh!

Scott D. Crawford

Clay, Alabama

For several months now this publication has contained articles dealing with different areas of hermeneutics and exegesis, and since we are at the end of the publishing year one more topic in this general vein is appropriate. As with any important document that deals directly with our lives, knowing how to deal with what the document DOESN'T say can be perplexing at times. Truly, as with any significant topic, what individuals believe on a topic can become very polarizing; yet, we firmly believe that the Lord of Creation has left us the ability to understand what to do when the Scriptures appear silent on an issue.

Before we continue, it might be helpful to describe two scenarios that are frequently brought into the conversation when speaking about Biblical Silence (BS). Sometimes we hear folks say something like “but the Bible doesn't say what type of car I should drive, or where I should live, etc., so silence in the Bible must be permissive.” True, the Bible never speaks for or against a Chevrolet Corvette, but this doesn't mean that the Bible is silent on the issue of the Corvette. The type of car we drive is a circumstance of our life, and the authority to drive a Corvette can be found in the Scriptures. Can you afford a Corvette? If not, then buying one would fly in the face of Biblical teaching on the necessity of good stewardship. On the other hand, there is the generic command to “Go” and a Corvette is a method by which “Going” can be achieved; the car becomes nothing more than expediency. The same might be said about whom one might marry. There is no explicit statement about whom a Christian should marry, but as we study our Bibles we find passages that build principles that effect both major and minor decisions in our live¹, even a potential mate.

Second, sometimes this comment is heard: “The Bible never mentions church buildings, a baptistery, or song books and yet you use them ... you aren't being consistent.” Things along this line fall under the general authority implied by commands and examples (for an excellent discussion of Implication see articles written by Bro. Jim Miller in previous publications). Without delving too deep into the subject of implication, it can safely be stated that those things that are required to carry out a direct command are authorized unless those things are condemned or forbidden in other passages of the Bible.² Even some of the

1 A. Berkeley Mickelsen. *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1963), 360.

2 George F. Beals. *How Implication Binds and Silence Forbids*, (Ann Arbor: PC Publications, 1998), 149.

strictest Biblical interpreters have little problem with things mentioned above because they are considered “so incidental to other clear objectives that they must be right.”³ Both of the above mentioned questions, if asked in earnest, can be a valuable starting point for study, but often these types of verbal jabs are presented as nothing more than a you are wrong so I can be wrong too argument (as if somehow all of us being wrong is more acceptable in the sight of God than some of us being right). But, let us continue.

In essence, there are only two sides to the coin of BS: Biblical Silence Permits (BSP), or Biblical Silence Forbids (BSF). There are some that take the position that BS is neither forbidding nor permissive; therefore, it is the individual’s choice if that action can be performed. This is the same as saying an action not mentioned in the Bible is permitted, and is therefore the same as saying BSP.⁴ It is interesting that for some of the BSP proponents, this is the bottom line. One author makes this observation:

“If Scripture speaks, obey it. If it is silent, write God your own “note” between him and you. Don’t copy other people’s notes and don’t make others write your note. Let it be yours alone...True biblical silence is permissive.”⁵

In other words, if the Bible is silent on something then that “something” would be in doubt, having neither pro nor con Biblical instruction and the individual gets to decide. Does the Bible speak about doing something when in doubt?

*“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).*⁶

This was written to those that doubted an action – eating meat sacrificed to idols. This is an example of the *when in doubt, don’t* principle.⁷ Those that were in doubt weren’t instructed to write a note between themselves and God, they were instructed to abstain from the action in question. This principle also applies to us for the simple reason that unless we have Biblical direction about BS, then we are forced to have doubt and not to act.

So ... do we have directions regarding BS?

In his commentary on the book of Acts, J. W. McGarvey makes a very pertinent

3 F. LaGard Smith. *The Cultural Church*. (Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1992), 195.

4 *Ibid.*, 87.

5 Jeffery S. Stevenson. *All People, All Times: Rethinking Biblical Authority In Churches of Christ*, (United States of America, 2009), 96.

6 All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

7 George F. Beals. *How Implication Binds and Silence Forbids*, (Ann Arbor: PC Publications, 1998), 89.

remark on the topic of silence – “if men are allowed (thus) to prove what is Scriptural doctrine, by what the Scriptures do not mention, there is no end to the doctrines and practices which the Bible may be made to defend.”⁸ There is certainly a depth of truth to that statement. As seen above, in the absence of a specific passage, sometimes it is a group of passages that provide the general principles by which a Christian can decide which course of action should be taken. First, look at 2 Timothy 3:16, 17: “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”

Please notice that the Scriptures speak of itself as being inclusive of all good works. Now with this verse in mind look to 1 Thessalonians 5:21: “*Test all things; hold fast what is good.*”

In this verse Paul instructs us to test, to prove, or to determine if something is good and only to do that. One should remember that the specific word used by Paul translated as “test” is related to the refining of metal in fire, thus removing the impurities. For a Christian, the fire in which we hold both doctrine and practice to remove the impurities must be the Scriptures – the word of God. So, if the Scriptures do not address a particular work (or is silent about it) then that work cannot be considered good, since all good works are in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; cf. 2 Pet. 1:3). But, we are also instructed to “hold fast,” or to do only that which we can prove to be good (1 Thess. 5:21). Therefore, if “we do that which is not in Scripture, where **ALL** good works are found, we violate 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and thus sin. In other words Bible silence forbids.”

Going further into the Scriptures, look back to Romans 14:23 which was quoted above. There the person that doubted was condemned because their actions didn’t proceed from faith. So, where does faith come from? How wonderful the Lord of Life told us specifically where faith is born. “17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Considering these verses we discover two things that can be set in stone: (1) whatever is not from faith is sin, and (2) faith comes by hearing the word of God. Presented in this fashion, these two truths amazingly adopt the form of the major and minor premise of a syllogism and therefore we can make a conclusion. Consider this ... whatever isn’t grounded in faith is sin, and we are clearly told that faith comes from hearing the word of God; therefore, whatever isn’t grounded in the word of God is sin. Thus, Bible silence forbids.⁹

⁸ J. W. McGarvey, *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostle* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 7th Ed.), 204.

⁹ George F. Beals, *How Implication Binds and Silence Forbids*, (Ann Arbor: PC Publications, 1998), 94-95.

Finally, look at Colossians 3:17 – *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* There are some very inclusive thoughts in this verse: “whatever,” “in word or deed,” and “all.” This speaks to the fact that authority (“in the name of”) to act is of utmost importance for a Christian. Even the most superficial level, those that advocate BSP should be forced into inaction since something that is not mentioned in the Bible cannot produce authority to act. When we seek authority for something within the Scriptures, we find that authority in either explicit statements (Acts 2:38), implicit statements (Mark 16:16), approved examples (Acts 20:7), or by expediency (Matthew 28:18-20). There is no better summation that could be written than these words of Goebel Music:

“The Bible authorizes by the above-mentioned ways, and if we do that in religion for which we do not have at least one of these ways establishing Bible authority, then we do that thing without divine sanction, without Bible authorization. No one can be pleasing unto God unless he has Bible authority for what he does. Doing a thing without Bible authorization is displeasing to God.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Goebel Music. Behold the Pattern, (Colleyville: Goebel Music Publications, 1991), 358.

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