

## QUESTION

I agree with you that women should not be elders, and agree with the passage you cite in 1 Timothy 3. Yet, you say women can be deacons. The descriptions of elders and deacons seem to be the same: for a man. Why do you allow women to be deacons at Mars Hill?

## RESPONSE: Brent Miller (Mars Hill Member)

With regards to your question, yes Mars Hill does promote women as deacons.

Let me try to explain the biblical basis for this position. In 1 Timothy 3:8-12 we read about the role of a deacon. Verses 8-10 obviously describe a male deacon. Verse 11 however in the NIV says this, "In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything." Now reading the verse in the NIV you get the impression that this refers exclusively to the wife of a male deacon.

The NASB however reads this way, "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." Reading it in this translation gives the verse a whole new thrust. The New American Standard Bible leaves open the option that Paul could be indicating that now he is turning his attention to women as deacons.

The difficulty here is that the word translated "wife" in the NIV is actually as the NASB and ESV translated it, the generic word for woman. The NIV beside the word wife has a footnote that says, "or deaconesses". The fact is that there are 3 possible meanings of this verse. Let me lay them out, and then explain the position of Mars Hill.

The first is that Paul is describing here a woman who is the wife of a deacon. That is, her husband is a deacon, and she is his wife. Reading the NIV this seems to be the conclusion of the translators. The second option is that Paul is referring to a woman who is a deacon, and is giving special instructions for her. Third, Paul is referring to any woman who assists a deacon.

Mars Hill's position is that this verse can cover all three of those meanings. A woman can be the wife of a deacon, she can be a deacon herself, or she can support or work with a deacon. In Romans 16:1 in the NIV we read, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant[a] of the church in Cenchrea." Then down at the bottom of the page it says "or deaconess." The word translated servant here is the same word translated deacon in our passage in 1 Timothy.

Furthermore, from a practical standpoint any time a person is a servant leader in a church they are acting in the role of a deacon (which means servant), so unless you put a man in charge of every office at a church (children's ministry, women's ministry etc) you will be appointing woman deacons whether you use that title or not.