

1 Timothy 3:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

Analysis

Even so must their wives be grave (Γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως σεμνάς, Gynaikas hōsautōs semnas)—'wives likewise must be dignified.' The Greek gynaikas can mean either 'wives' (of deacons) or 'women' (female deacons/deaconesses). Context could support either: qualifications for deacons' wives, or qualifications for female deacons (like Phoebe in Romans 16:1). Semnos means dignified, respectable, serious.

Not slanderers (μὴ διαβόλους, mē diabolous)—'not slanderers,' from diabolos meaning accuser, slanderer (same word used for 'devil'). **Sober, faithful in all things** (νηφαλίους, pistas en pasin, nēphalious, pistas en pasin)—'sober-minded, faithful in all things.' Nēphalios means clear-headed, temperate. Pistas means faithful, trustworthy, reliable.

Whether deacons' wives or female deacons, these women must demonstrate the same character qualities required of male deacons—dignity, truthfulness, temperance, reliability. Women in ministry (formal or informal) need proven character, not gossiping or slandering but speaking truth, faithful in responsibilities entrusted to them.

Historical Context

Women served prominently in the early church—Phoebe was a deacon (Romans 16:1), Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), Philip had four prophesying daughters

(Acts 21:9). Whether as deacons' wives supporting their husbands' ministry or as female deacons serving officially, these women needed character matching their male counterparts. The standards are identical—godliness transcends gender.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Does this verse describe deacons' wives or female deacons—what's the evidence for each view?
2. Why are the character qualifications for women in ministry similar to those for male deacons?
3. How does the church today honor and utilize women's gifts while maintaining biblical order?

Interlinear Text

γυναῖκας	ώσαύτως	σεμνάς	μὴ	διαβόλους	νηφαλέους
must their wives	Even so	be grave	not	slanderers	sober
G1135	G5615	G4586	G3361	G1228	G3524
πιστὰς	ἐν	πᾶσιν			
faithful	in	all things			
G4103	G1722	G3956			

Additional Cross-References

Titus 2:3 (Parallel theme): The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

Titus 3:2 (Parallel theme): To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

1 Timothy 3:2 (Parallel theme): A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

2 Timothy 3:3 (Parallel theme): Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Proverbs 10:18 (Parallel theme): He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.

Jeremiah 9:4 (Faith): Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.

1 Peter 5:8 (Parallel theme): Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: