

Pt 53 Romans 16:1-2 Phebe, A Servant of the Church

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Romans 16:1-16

1 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

We have reached the final chapter of the Book of Romans. Paul will now give greetings and tributes to certain people. He mentions 27 men and 8 women for a total of 36 names. Eight of the people he mentions are currently with him in Corinth where he is writing this letter, and the rest are in Rome. Most of the names are Gentile names.

By Paul mentioning all of these people, it shows how much he knew about the Church in Rome. Although he had never been there, he was well acquainted with many of the people. It is always nice as a Pastor or Preacher when you know a lot of the people in the congregation. You have a connection, and it makes things more personable.

I had originally planned to cover half of this chapter in one message; however, after I began studying, I realized that would not be possible. So, we are going to be looking at some of these names individually in order to get a clear understanding of the Scriptures.

We will begin by looking at the first person Paul listed and that is Phebe.

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Paul was not shy to give credit where credit is due. We know in that time period women were considered lower class and would usually have been mentioned last if at all. But, the first person Paul mentions is indeed a woman; **Phebe**. Interestingly enough, the way we pronounce this name is not correct. The correct pronunciation is **foy'-bay**. Her name means "**bright, or radiant.**" She was from Cenchrea which is a port city in Corinth.

This is the first and only place in the Bible where Phebe is mentioned. Paul says she "**is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.**"

There is a lot of controversy over what that word "**servant**" means here. In fact, if you are using a New International Version (NIV), a International Standard Version (ISV), or New Living Translation (NLT), version of the Bible it is translated as "**Deacon**" and if you are using a Revised Standard (RSV) it is translated as "**Deaconess.**" This would be incorrect. In fact, nowhere in the King James Bible will you find the word "Deaconess" used.

I'm not one that thinks you have to run to the Greek or Hebrew text to be able to understand Scripture. I believe the King James Bible is inspired and perfect and we are able to understand it with the help of the Holy Ghost just the way it is written.

But of course you will have some that will say "well, Bro. Byron, in the Greek the word used here is **dee-ak'-on-os**, the same word in which we get the word **Deacon** from." Then they will build a case for why the Church should have women deacons. There is nothing further from the truth.

We either believe the King James Bible is infallible (which means without error) or we don't. Many of the modern translation Bible user's have a big problem – they do not believe their Bibles are 100% accurate or that there are "gray areas." I would hate to think the Bible that I rely upon is not 100% correct or there are "gray areas" that I couldn't trust or understand. But we know that's not the case.

First of all, the Greek word that the so-called "Bible scholars" want to throw out is the word **dee-ak'-on-os**. That is a legitimate Greek word and is in the original Greek text. Not all Bible translations use the same Greek text. The King James uses the **Textus Receptus** which is a Latin term meaning "**Received Text.**"

The King James Bible translates the Greek word **dee-ak'-on-os** 30 different times. But the thing is, it is translated in 3-different ways based upon the context of how it is used.

1. Minister: 14 times, Ministers: 6 times
2. Servant: 5 times, Servants: 3 times
3. Deacons: 3 times
 - a. (when singular "Deacon" the Greek word is *dee-ak-on-eh'-o*

The very base meaning of the word is "**an attendant,**" or "**one who serves.**"

The King James translators correctly translated this word as "**servant**" here in Romans 16. It is exactly the same as the Lord Jesus mentions in **John 12:26** *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*

If you rightly divide the Word of Truth, then you know the Bible teaches that a woman cannot hold a position of authority in the Church.

In fact, listen to what the Bible says in: **1 Corinthians 14:34-35** *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

1 Timothy 2:11-12 *Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*

As for being a Deaconess, there is no such office. The office of Deacon is only for men as we read in the Scriptures:

1 Timothy 3:8-13

8 Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless.

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

12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The truth is, the Bible teaches that a woman's primary place is in the home and to her husband and children. That's not to say women cannot do certain work such as teaching other women or children, or serving in some other capacity, but they are not to be in a position of authority or hold an office of Pastor or Deacon in the Church, which by the way, are the only two Biblical offices for the New Testament Church.

Why is this important? Because God is a God of order: **1 Corinthians 14:40** **Let all things be done decently and in order.**

My dad was a great Bible teacher. In 2015, one year before he died from cancer, he filled in for me at our former Church on a Wednesday evening. He taught a lesson on God's Order. I came across his notes as I was studying for this message, and I would like to read them to you:

THE GOD OF ORDER

The controversy surrounding the issues of the woman's role in the Church is largely due to a lack of understanding of the divine order of male/female responsibilities. Adam was created first, then because he was insufficient alone, God created Eve and presented her to Adam.

The man is to leave his parent's home and make a home of his own for his woman and any children that they may have. This places a great responsibility upon the man to provide and protect his wife and family. By virtue of the male's superior strength and natural aggression this role falls to him. As he was created in the image of God, his role includes a sacrificial love for his woman that if required he would die for. It logically follows that the man will desire that his woman receive the utmost respect and will be encouraged by him to develop and practice any natural or divine gifts that may be given her. In no way should the role of the man be one of oppression. God never oppresses his children, but encourages them to use their gifts and talents to the fullest.

The woman was created from the side of man and her divine role is to be at the side of her man. The woman is by nature not as strong physically nor is she normally as aggressive due to hormonal differences. The nature of woman is that of nurturer, comforter, supporter, advisor, and encourager as she too was created in the image of God. She is exactly what man needs as man is exactly what woman needs in order for both to be fulfilled in God's order of things. She has been given this role just as man has been given his role. When this is understood and practiced, harmony is the result. Personal fulfillment is the outcome.

The notion that men are to lord it over women is not God's will as some seem to think it is. The virtues of both man and woman are to be combined into one entity in accordance with God's original plan. This order of male/female roles is to be followed within the church. Men are to provide and protect. This places them in positions of pastors, deacons, and other church offices which require facing a hostile world. A strong male role is needed as well when protecting the church from false teaching and heresies that often creep in. Men in the church also must understand that the women have God given abilities and divine gifts that must be used in order for the church to function harmoniously.

When the divine order of male/female roles is ignored, dysfunction occurs. This is why the Apostle Paul did not allow women in the role of teaching men. This is a sign of weak male leadership. His scolding is directed at the men of Corinth in this instance. Women teaching men is a reversal of the divine order and should only be practiced when no man is willing or available, just as when a home is deprived of a man the woman must assume that role. There are roles for both men and women in the church, they are equal in importance. The church that deprives women of their God given characteristics and divine gifts is a dysfunctional church as much as the church that places women in male roles as pastors, deacons and other offices that require male characteristics. As the Apostle Paul stated to the Corinthians who were out of order, "God is a God of order and decency."

James Chesney March 24, 2015

In the case of Phebe, servant of the Church, she was more than likely a wealthy widow that helped with certain things in the Church, and assisted many people. She even assisted Paul, as he writes: "**she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.**" That word "**succourer**" means "**one who aides, helps, or defends others.**"

We have no idea of exactly how she helped Paul. It could have been any number of things: helped him in sickness (which he often was), gave him and his missionary team a place to stay when they traveled through Cenchrea, or waited on him for things he may have needed in the ministry.

Some believe that perhaps Phebe owned a home there in Cenchrea which she opened up to fellow believers who were traveling or even to congregate together for services. But the Bible does not tell us that, it is only speculation. What we do know is that she was a servant of the church.

For whatever reason, Phebe has business in Rome and Paul wants to make sure the people there help her with anything she needs. He says in **verse 2: that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you.** It was common in those days for people to carry a letter of recommendation from someone whenever they traveled to a different country. If you have ever traveled outside of the U.S., you know they ask you questions and check your papers before they allow you into a foreign country. Since Paul is having to tell people in Rome who she is then its obvious she hasn't been there before. Paul writes her a letter of commendation so she will be accepted by the Romans.

It is also believed that Phebe was whom actually delivered Paul's letter to the Romans. A lot of Bibles, at the very end of the Book of Romans, have a note that says: *Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phebe servant of the church at Cenchrea.* I checked several Bibles that I have and about half of them have it and half doesn't.

God includes many different people in the Bible. Some He provides an abundant information about, other's only their name in passing, and some, like Phebe, are given as an example to model our lives after; "**A servant of the church**" and "**a succourer of many.**"