

## Introduction

Currently, there is talk about the mid-term elections. When I think of voting for someone to lead, there are two very important areas that we must individually consider before casting a vote: character and capability. We always need to look at the character of a candidate. The trust, respect, influence, and ability to lead others hinges greatly on the character of the person. The second quality is the capability of the leader. If a person has good character, but not have the ability to cast vision, plan, set goals, build a team, communicate, and lead, he will fail miserably as a leader. So, we must have leaders who have both character and capability.

A few years ago, the leader of a large denomination said that their churches needed to focus on raising up more women as pastors, and in particular, black women. My response is that we need to raise up more qualified leaders. The leaders we raise up must have character above reproach, as outlined in 1 Timothy 3, and in Titus 1:5-8, and they must be able to manage the affairs of the church. We don't ordain leaders because of their sex or color; we confirm leaders that the Lord has called to lead, and who have both character and capability.

Two weeks ago, we looked at Part 1 of Paul's Concluding Remarks. He shared his purpose in writing, which was to remind them of some points. Second, he shared about his ministry, telling them what God had accomplished through him, what he was currently doing, and what his future plans were. Finally, Paul requested them to pray for him, and he gave them three specific things to pray about. In Romans 16:1-2, Paul introduces Phoebe, who in all likelihood, delivered this letter from Paul to the churches in Rome. In verses 3-16, Paul gives greetings to various individuals and churches in Rome. He mentions fifteen individuals by name and four churches. This morning, we are going to look at the first couple of verses, and I have titled it, "Paul's Commendation of Phoebe."

Phoebe is a leader who had both character and capability. Paul commended her to the church in Rome, and Paul's commendation is a weighty endorsement. Paul briefly shares who she is and how she serves in her local church, and then exhorts the saints in Rome to accept her and help her with any needs she may have.

## Paul's Concluding Remarks – Part 2 – Paul's Commendation of Phoebe

1. Phoebe's Personal Information
2. Phoebe's Ministry
3. Paul's Exhortations

(Rom 16:1-2) "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; {2} that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well."

### 1. Phoebe's Personal Information (Rom 16:1-2)

Paul begins by commending Phoebe, saying, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe." The word commend is "synistao," which is a compound word meaning to join in standing, to introduce, or to commend. The Amplified Bible reads, "Now I introduce and commend to you our sister Phoebe..." I believe this captures Paul's intent. Paul is both introducing and vouching for Phoebe's character, capability, and reputation. His endorsement is a significant one.

(Rom 16:1) "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;"

(Rom 16:1 AMP) "NOW I introduce *and* commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae,"

Phoebe's name comes from phoibos (Strong's G5402), which comes from the root word, phos (Strong's G5457), meaning to shine bright. Phoebe was a woman that shined bright and was a great witness to people.

Paul calls her "our sister", which indicates that she is a believer and part of the family of God. In many churches, the women are referred to as sister Karen, sister Della, or sister Sarah. This is not Paul's sister, who is mentioned in Acts 23, whose son informed the commander of the plot against Paul, but this is "our sister," meaning a sister in the Lord. Referring to one another as brother and sister puts everyone on a common level. Paul's reference to her as "our sister" encouraged the saints in Rome to also embrace her as their sister, and treat her like family.

(Acts 23:16) "But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul."

Phoebe is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, which is five to nine miles southeast of Corinth, which is where Paul was when he wrote the letter to the Romans. Paul was preparing to go to Jerusalem (Rom 15:25), which probably corresponds to the journey recorded in Acts 20-21, which began in Corinth. Cenchrea is a coastal town, and is one of two harbors controlled by Corinth. (Lechaeumon was the harbor on the western side.) Cenchrea was important for its harbor that allowed ships to transport their cargoes between Asia Minor and Italy, Achaia, and Macedonia. The name Cenchrea, comes from a word that means millet, which is likely something that was grown in that area.

On Paul's second missionary trip, he was accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla, who we will look at next week, and they stopped at Cenchrea to have his hair cut and fulfill a Nazirite vow. Afterwards, they sailed on to Ephesus, where he left them, and then he sailed on to Caesarea. Earlier in Acts 18, Paul had spent six months in Corinth. Many people in Corinth believed and were baptized, so Paul stayed there teaching the word of God to them. It is likely that Phoebe became a believer through Paul's ministry in Corinth and the surrounding area. Paul knew and ministered to the saints in Cenchra and Corinth. Most scholars believe that Paul gave this letter to Phoebe to take and read to the churches in Rome.

(Acts 18:18) "Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow."

## 2. **Phoebe's Ministry** (Rom 16:1-2)

We find two things in Paul's commendation about Phoebe's ministry. First, Paul identifies her as a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea. Second, he said that she has been a helper of many, and that she had also helped Paul. Let's take a look at both of these, because they are very significant and have a lot of relevance to leadership, and in particular, women in the role of church leadership.

(Rom 16:1-2) “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; {2} that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

The word for servant is diakonos (Strong's G1249), which means servant. It comes from diako, which means to run errands, to wait tables, or to attend. The word refers to three specific things. All leaders should have a servant's heart. Paul referred to Jesus as a diakonos to the circumcision in Romans 15:8. In Mark 10:45, Jesus said that He came to serve, not to be served, and the verb tense of the same word is used. Jesus repeatedly told His disciples to lead by serving others. So, sometimes the use of servant refers to the character trait of serving others. We see that Phoebe had helped many people so there is no doubt that she had the heart of a servant.

(Rom 15:8) “For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers,”

(Mark 10:45) “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (diakoneo, Strong's G1247), and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians to refer to Apollos and him as servants. In Numbers 12:7, God calls Moses His servant. We are all to be servants of God, but there are those leaders who are known as God's servants. Paul, Apollos, and Moses are just examples of servants of God.

(1 Cor 3:5) “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one.”

(Num 12:7) “Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;”

The third way that diakonos is used is in reference to the office of deacon. The word, deacon, is a transliteration, meaning that the Greek word was not translated, but made into an English word. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul gave the qualifications for deacons. These are qualifications for people who serve in an official, leadership capacity in a local church. Deacons, like the elders, are to have character above reproach. They are to have dignity, not be double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain. They are to hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Deacons are to be first tested, and then they can serve if they are above reproach. Deacons are tried and tested. Their character and capability are verified before being set in as deacons. Deacons must also have a good family life, and be good managers of their children.

(1 Tim 3:8-13) “Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, {9} *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. {10} These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. {11} Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. {12} Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. {13} For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus did not serve a local church in the office of servant (deacon). Moses did not serve in the office of deacon in the local church. Paul did not serve a local church in the office of servant (deacon). Jesus, Moses, and Paul were servants, meaning that their lives were characterized by

serving God and serving people, but they were not in the office of servant. Moses and Paul were servants of God, but not in the office of servant. Phoebe had a servant's heart, and was a servant of God, and she was also in the office of servant or deacon in Cenchrea.

The translators decided to transliterate in 1 Timothy, using the term deacon, while translating diakonos in Romans 16:1 as servant. This is what I call a translator's bias, as they did not believe that women should serve in a leadership role, so they translated it as servant in Romans 16:1. Another example of translator's bias in the qualifications for a deacon in 1 Timothy 3:11. The KJV translates the Greek word, *gune*, as the wife of a deacon, instead of woman. Again, I believe it is because they did not believe a woman should be in a leadership position in the church. The fact that the qualifications are sandwiched between the qualifications for men, and that there are no qualifications for the wives of elders makes it pretty clear that these qualifications are not for the wives of those serving as deacons, but are for women who are going to serve in the official capacity as a servant of the church, a deaconess. The qualifications for a woman serving as a deacon given in 1 Timothy 3:11 are similar to the qualifications of male servants. They are to be dignified, not malicious gossips, temperate, and faithful in all things.

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

The first deacons in the church were set in place in Acts 6, which was probably around 30 AD. The Greek widows were being overlooked in the serving of food, and the problem was brought to the attention of the apostles. They said it was not good for them to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, they told the congregation to select seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, that they could put in charge of this task, so that they could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Those two priorities apply to everyone, but are extremely important for every pastor. So, the congregation brought forth seven men, and after praying about the men brought forth, they laid hands on them. These were the first deacons, and notice that they were all men.

(Acts 6:1-6) "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*. {2} So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. {3} "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. {4} "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." {5} The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. {6} And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them."

Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy around 64 AD, and in that letter he gave the qualifications of elders and deacons. The apostles in Acts 6 had asked for seven men of good reputation, and now Paul, thirty-four years later, includes women. This letter to the saints in Rome was written around 56-57 AD, and Phoebe is mentioned as a servant to the church, or a deaconess. Somewhere between 30 AD and 56 AD, the apostles decided to allow women to serve in a leadership capacity in the local churches. The significance of this verse is that Phoebe is the first and only mentioned deacon in the New Testament.

Paul told the Romans to help her in whatever matter she has need of. She was there on official church business, and they were to give her assistance in those matters. We do not know what those exact matters were, only that they were important. Again, this points to the fact that she was in the office of a deaconess.

Because Phoebe was called a diakonos, some Bible scholars believe that Phoebe served as a pastor, or even an apostle. Since Paul was also called a diakonos, they believe that Phoebe served in the same office as Paul. I do not agree with that interpretation, as I believe that the reference to Paul was about his servant's heart, not the office of deacon. Paul served as an apostle, and is clearly mentioned as an apostle throughout the New Testament. They have confused the distinction between character and office, and I believe that Phoebe was in the office of deacon. I find nothing to support the claims that she was an elder or apostle. It is clear that she had a great reputation, and served in a leadership capacity in the church at Cenchrea.

There is one more word that is used here that gives us an indication that she is a deaconess. Paul writes that Phoebe has been a helper of many, including himself. The Greek word for helper that was used is *prostatis* (Strong's G4368). This is the only place that it is used in Scripture. In fact, it is not a very common word, even in Greek literature. *Prostatis* is the feminine form of the root word, *proistemi*, which means to stand over, preside, or rule. In Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, they define *prostatis* as: a woman set over others, a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources. In 1 Timothy 3, both elders and deacons are required to *proistemi*, or to manage or rule. Anyone can serve in the church, but deacons and deaconesses are required to manage and preside over, not just serve. There are lots of leadership skills involved in managing and ruling, and we looked at some of those last week. Phoebe was able to manage, lead, preside over, and rule over business matters in the church.

Strong's G4368. *prostatis*, pros-tat'-is; fem. of a der. of G4291; a patroness, i.e. assistant:--succourer. [G4291. *proistemi*, pro-is'-tay-mee; from G4253 and G2476; to stand before, i.e. (in rank) to preside, or (by impl.) to practise:--maintain, be over, rule.]

(1 Tim 3:4-5) "He must be one who manages (*proistemi*) his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity {5} (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?);"

(1 Tim 3:12) "Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers (*proistemi*) of their children and their own households."

Many scholars, particularly those that do not believe that women can serve in a leadership role in the church, say that *prostatis* meant someone who was benevolent and wealthy, and liberally supported Paul and others. Some believe she was "a businesswoman of considerable wealth, and used her influence and financial means, as well as her personal time and effort, as a helper of many fellow believers and of Paul."<sup>1</sup> Again, I believe this is an attempt by those that do not believe that women should serve in an official leadership position in the church. Phoebe was not just a deaconess in the church of Cenchrea, but she had the ability to manage, preside over, rule, and lead people. There is no question that she, in her leadership capacity, had helped Paul out on different occasions.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, <https://www.gty.org/library/bibleqnas-library/QA0301/was-phoebe-a-deaconess>

### 3. Paul's Exhortations (Romans 16:2)

Paul gave two exhortations to the saints in Rome about Phoebe. First, he told them to receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints. Second, he told her to help her in whatever matter she may have need of, for she has been a helper of many, and of Paul, himself. Since Paul knew so many of the people in Rome, his commendation and exhortations carried a lot of weight.

(Rom 16:2) “that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

Many years ago, when I was moving from Acworth, Georgia to Albuquerque, New Mexico, my friend and pastor, Dave Meadows, wrote a letter of commendation for me to give to the pastor at the new church we joined. The pastor in New Mexico had never received a letter of this kind, and he did not know Dave Meadows. Consequently, he did not receive me as he should have. I sat on the bench for five years, not being allowed to preach on Sundays, or be involved with the leadership. Paul did not want Phoebe to be received that way; he wanted her to be received and to be helped in whatever needs she had.

#### a. Receive her in a manner worthy of the saints

Paul told the saints in Rome to receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints. In Matthew 25, in the separation of the goats and sheep, He tells the sheep that He was hungry and they gave Him something to eat. He was thirsty, and they gave Him something to drink. He was a stranger and they invited Him in. He was naked and they clothed Him. He was sick and they visited Him. He was in prison, and they came to Him. They asked Jesus when they had done these things unto Him. He answered, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” Paul is telling the church to receive and accept her as they would receive the Lord.

(Matt 25:34-40) “Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. {35} 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; {36} naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' {37} "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? {38} 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? {39} 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' {40} "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me.'”

The apostle Paul, after receiving Christ as his Lord and Savior, fled Damascus and went to Jerusalem. He tried to associate (kollao, Strong's G2853, to glue) with the disciples, but they did not receive or accept him. They did not trust him and did not believe he was a disciple. Barnabas took him to the apostles and described to them how Paul had been converted on the road to Damascus, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. Then, with the apostles' blessing, Paul was received and accepted by the church in Jerusalem. He was then able to move about freely among the saints in Jerusalem. When we receive someone, we take down our defensives, and allow them to come into our lives. We extend our trust and acceptance to them so that they are free to fellowship with us.

(Acts 9:26-28) “When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. {27} But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. {28} And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.”

The opposite is when we do not receive and accept someone, they are an outsider looking in. They are not part of the group. They are not trusted and there our antennas are always up around them. Paul had just written for them to receive and accept one another, and now he is exhorting them to receive and accept Phoebe. People know when they are accepted or not. We were in a church and one of the young girls said that she was not accepted by the other girls. They were all in public schools, and she was being home-schooled. They did not invite her to participate. They excluded her from their conversations. This young girl said they were a clique, and she was not welcomed into their group. People know when we receive them or reject them. Churches, including youth groups, need to receive and accept people. We need to learn to welcome people as if we were welcoming the Lord.

#### **b. Help her in whatever matter she may have need of**

Paul's second exhortation was for the saints to help Phoebe in whatever matter she may have need of from them. Paul tells them that she has been a helper to many people, including himself. He has vouched for her reputation of helping others, and asks them to help her.

(Rom 16:2) “that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

We looked at the Greek word for helper earlier, which is *prostatis*. The KJV translates it here as a succourer, and the NASB says a helper. Whether Phoebe was a wealthy woman who used her wealth to help others is not clear to me. I believe she used her influence as a leader, and her resources, however much they were, to help others.

I have found that some of the most giving people are those without great resources. They have a heart of giving, and they gladly give of what they have. They will do anything for you, and give you what they have because they are givers. I have also been around some poor people that did not bring food to a pot luck, give to the church, or even offer an honorarium when I did funerals for their families. They did not have a generous heart that gave or shared with others. There are some wealthy people who do not share their wealth with others. I have been around some wealthy people that generously gave to others. It all comes down to the heart. The passage is not about how much Phoebe had, but how she helped others with what she had. We need to have the heart of Phoebe that used what resources she had to help many, including the apostle Paul.

#### **Conclusion and Applications**

Paul's commendation of Phoebe, and his exhortations to the saints in Rome to receive her and help her are significant. It is very clear that God allowed women to serve in a leadership capacity in the churches in the New Testament, at least in the office of deacon. This has application today, where more women are now being allowed to serve in leadership roles. We need to welcome women into leadership roles, as long as they are qualified to lead.

Paul's introduction and commendation of Phoebe highlight several important principles of leadership. Leaders need to have a servant's heart. Phoebe had a servant's heart and was in the official office of deaconess at the church in Corinth. Leaders must also be able to manage, rule, preside over, and lead others, and Phoebe was called a *prostatis*, a woman who managed and ruled over others. Third, leaders need to have a good reputation, and Phoebe had a great reputation. She helped many people, including Paul himself. We need leaders today that have both character and capability. Phoebe is a great example for us to follow, not just for female leaders, but all leaders.

### **Prayer**

Father God, thank You for this passage about Phoebe. We need women to serve in the local church. We need strong, capable, God-fearing women that can help lead in the church. I pray that You will bring capable women to the Connection Church. I pray that You will bring women that can lead, manage, rule, and help others. I pray that You will bring women with hearts to serve and to help. I pray that we will receive them in the Lord in a worthy manner. I pray that we can help them fulfill the calling on their lives and to accomplish the work that You have given them to do. Help us to have a healthy, Biblical attitude towards women. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Q & A**

- Who is the strongest woman leader that you know? What stands out about her leadership?
- What are some of the keys to being able to preside over and lead others?
- How can you tell when a person has a servant's heart?
- Does a person need a title in order to serve in the local church?
- What are some ways that people will know that we have received and accepted them into our church?
- Many times, when a person comes into the church, we think of what he/she can do for us. What did Paul ask the church at Rome to do that reflected a very different attitude?

**Introduction** (1 Tim 3, Tit 1:5-8, Rom 16:1-2)

1. **Phoebe's Personal Information** (Rom 16:1-2, Acts 23:16, Acts 18:18)
  
2. **Phoebe's Ministry** (Rom 16:1-2, Rom 15:8, Mark 10:45, 1 Cor 3:5, Num 12:7, 1 Tim 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6, 1 Tim 3:4-5, 1 Tim 3:12)
  
3. **Paul's Exhortations** (Romans 16:2)
  - a. **Receive her in a manner worthy of the saints** (Matt 25:34-40, Acts 9:26-28)
  
  - b. **Help her in whatever matter she may have need of** (Rom 16:2)

**Conclusion and Applications**