

Introduction

- There are a lot of names here! Notice that 16:3-16 gives us the names of all the people Paul already knows in Rome. He didn’t start the church, hadn’t visited them yet, but the apostle knew many people there. Strive to know people better in this congregation! 16:21-24 bring greetings of people with Paul in Corinth. Phoebe, this first name (16:1,2), stands apart.
- More names are mentioned here than in any other place in the N.T. (except for the genealogies). In other words, *Paul is as relational as he is doctrinal* – we must have both to have a healthy Christian life!
- Today we’re going to look at the first name in chapter 16. In this chapter we’ll learn some things about how churches and believers should be involved in each other’s lives, and see what Paul values most in believers’ service and character.

The Honored Servant Bringing the Word (16:1)

16:1 *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant [διάκονον] of the church which is at Cenchrea...*

Family

- Paul calls Phoebe “*our sister*.” The spiritual family relationship in Christ is not limited to local congregations. Even though the Romans have not met Phoebe, she is still their sister.¹
- We are family because we have the same Father (Ephesians 4:6), same Brother (Hebrews 2:11,12), and have the same inheritance in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).²

¹ This is a metaphor describing a spiritual relationship.

² The Baptist Catechism of Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) teaches us this about our adoption: Q. 38. What is **adoption**? A. **Adoption** is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God (1 John 3:1;

- We are called to interact with each other as family (1 Timothy 5:1,2).

Servant of the Church

- This is the first time the word “*church*” is used in this letter!
- It’s possible that Phoebe is bringing this letter to the Romans to the saints.³
 - She’s coming with Paul’s commendation.
 - Cenchrea is a port of Corinth, where Paul is probably writing this letter.
 - She is a “*helper*” (16:2), something similar to a patron, to Paul. As a patron she has the means and freedom to travel to Rome.

Is Phoebe a Deaconess?

- This word (translated either “*deacon*” or “*servant*”) is connected to a specific congregation, similar to that in Philippians 1:1.
- In the first few centuries, deaconesses were used to baptize women and in ministerial visitation to women.
- Even if she does not hold the office of deacon, she is clearly involved in a diaconate (service) ministry – this is an ideal for all believers, and the office deacon is meant to be an example for that ideal.⁴

John 1:12; Rom. 8:16,17). Believer, you are a child of God because of what He has done in Christ, and not because of how good you are or what you have done – rest in your adoption, and give Him thanks for it!

³ Some early manuscripts of Romans contain a subscript to the letter, reflected in the K.J.V. and other early English translations: “Written to the Romans from Corinth, *and sent* by Phoebe, servant of the Church which is at Cenchrea” (1599 Geneva Bible).

⁴ The greatest example of service Jesus’ own, Who came to serve us by laying down His life in our place that we might have forgiveness for sins (Matthew 20:28/Mark 10:45). The word is used in the N.T.

“Phoebe: a Model for a Christian Woman’s Service”

from Romans 16:1,2 (N.A.S.B.)

Pastor Michael Head – Indian Hills Baptist Church, Silver City, NM

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- The words “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor” are never applied to a woman in the New Testament.⁵

A Biblical Defense of the Office of Deaconess

- What about the qualifications for the office of deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-13?

General Qualifications (3:8-10)

^{3:8}*In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ^{3:9}They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.*

^{3:10}*They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*

Qualifications for Deaconesses (3:11)

^{3:11}*In the same way, the women⁶ are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

to describe table-serving (Matthew 8:15//Mark 1:31//Luke 4:39; Luke 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; John 12:2; Acts 6:2), financial support (Luke 8:3; Romans 15:25), physical aid in distress (Matthew 4:11//Mark 1:13; Matthew 25:44; Hebrews 6:10), or help/comfort (Acts 19:22; Philemon 13). A true church meets each others’ needs (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-37); false believers would not (Matthew 25:41-46; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:16,17).

⁵ Our confession of faith says that the Church’s “scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture” (*Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, VI).

⁶ The Greek word γυνή can be translated either “woman” or “wife,” depending on context. In 3:11, these individuals are not mentioned in reference to a husband (as they are in 3:12), so I believe it should be rendered as the N.I.V. does here: “women” (the N.A.S.B. and N.C.V. do the same). The E.S.V., H.C.S.B., K.J.V., N.K.J.V., N.L.T., on the other hand, render the word in 3:11 to be “wives”; they usually insert

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Qualifications for Deacons (3:12)

^{3:12}*A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

General Qualifications (3:13)

^{3:13}*Those who have served⁷ well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.⁸*

Congregational Hospitality (16:2)

^{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 [προστάτις] of many, and of myself as well.*

In the Lord

- The phrase “in the Lord” occurs seven times in this chapter (16:2,8,11,12 [2x],13,22).⁹ The title “Lord” is reserved for Jesus; the beginning of the letter speaks of “Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:4) and “the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:7). In other words, this chapter, so full of personal greetings, *is still a Jesus chapter!*

How the Saints Are to Receive the Church’s Servants

- READ 3 John 5-8

Known as a Helper

a possessive pronoun here (“their wives”), even though there is no such pronoun in the original Greek.

⁷ The English verb “served” translates the original διακονήσαντες (from διακονέω), the verb form of the noun διάκονος, which we translate “servant,” or “deacon.”

⁸ I used the New International Version here; in this section I think it most accurately reflects the original Greek.

⁹ Outside of this chapter, it occurs in 14:14. The phrase “in Christ” occurs many more times in this letter (3:24; 6:3,11,23; 8:1,2,39; 9:1; 12:5; 15:17; 16:3,7,9,10).