

OPENING SCRIPTURE –

*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every entreaty on your behalf, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus – **Philippians 1:3-6.***

Humanly speaking, three people gave us THE BOOK OF ROMANS: THE APOSTLE PAUL, TERTIUS, and PHOEBE.

I. THE APOSTLE PAUL was the human instrument through whom THE HOLY SPIRIT revealed to us THE INSPIRED TEXT of the epistle we have been studying. Every word of INSPIRED SCRIPTURE has two authors: (1) THE HOLY SPIRIT, who both reveals and providentially guarantees the accuracy of the text, and (2) THE HUMAN AUTHOR, whose experiences and language traits are reflected in the writing of the text.

II. Focusing on the human-side of this equation, PAUL dictated his letter to a scribe named TERTIUS, who penned... *at least the majority* ... of THE BOOK OF ROMANS. PAUL dictated the text to him while they were in CORINTH. TERTIUS asserts this in ROMANS 16:22 which reads: *“I – TERTIUS – who wrote this letter – greet you in THE LORD.”*

III. Finally, PAUL didn’t have email – and THE COMPLETED SCROLL had to get from CORINTH to ROME – and this is where PHOEBE’S SERVICE TO PAUL AND TO THE CHURCH came into play.

★ PHOEBE DELIVERED THE ORIGINAL SCROLL TO ROME¹ – [READ ROMANS 16:1-2] –

NOW I AM INFERRING THAT SHE DELIVERED THE SCROLL TO ROME BUT I AM DOING SO WITH A SOLID BASIS FOR MAKING THIS CLAIM:

I. First, notice what PAUL instructs THE ROMAN CHURCH to do; he says in VERSE 2: *“RECEIVE HER.”* And then he says: *“HELP HER (προστάτις).”* Why would PAUL say, ‘RECEIVE HER’ and ‘HELP HER’ if PHOEBE had remained in CÉNCHREAE? He wouldn’t; he only would ask THE ROMAN CHURCH to ‘RECEIVE HER’ and to ‘HELP HER’ if she were traveling to ROME in service to THE CHURCH there.

(Notice also, there is AN OFFICIAL EPISTOLARY COMMENDATION.)

II. PAUL uses a formal commendation that was common in the ancient world when sending someone on an official mission to a community not acquainted with the emissary being sent there. The phrase, *“I COMMEND TO YOU” (συνίστημι ὑμῖν)* was the recognized commendation of an *official ‘letter-bearer.’* If PHOEBE were residing in ROME, she already would be known by THE ROMAN CHURCH, so it would be unnecessary to commend her in the formal manner in which PAUL INTRODUCES HER to THE ROMANS.

III. Third, ancient letters had to be *‘hand delivered.’* There simply was no other way to send correspondence to distant locations. And usually the one delivering the letter would then read it to the recipients – so someone travelled to ROME and PHOEBE seems to be the logical choice.

IV. Beyond these things, PHOEBE was from CÉNCHREAE, a town near CORINTH – a port city from which passage on a ship bound for ROME could be booked easily.

¹ As the crow flies, the distance from Cénchrea to Rome was just over 600-miles, and the travel time by ship would have been approximately 12-to-15-days if the conditions were ideal, but more likely – accounting for weather-related issues – the journey would have taken 2-to-4-weeks, especially if she booked passage on one of the slower, Alexandrian Grain Fleet ships.

So I think PHOEBE not only delivered THE SCROLL to ROME but she stood before the congregation there and read the entire letter aloud.

F.F. BRUCE² wrote these words about PHOEBE: “*PHOEBE appears to have been the bearer of the letter.*”

DOUGLAS MOO follows F.F. BRUCE by writing: “*PAUL’S commendation of PHOEBE in VERSES 1-2 probably indicated she was the one who carried the letter to ROME.*”

So to sum up, though the text does not say explicitly “*PHOEBE delivered the letter*” ...

- The placement of her name as the first-mentioned name in THE CHAPTER ...
- The nature of the instructions given by PAUL to RECEIVE AND HELP HER,
- PAUL’S official commendation of her as his emissary ...
- Her city-of-origin being a port-city near CORINTH, *and* ...
- The standard delivery practice of the day suggests she was the trusted courier of PAUL’S EPISTLE – and it is in this primary sense that PHOEBE was ‘A SERVANT of the CHURCH.’

WHY IS THIS LIST OF MOSTLY ANONYMOUS NAMES INCLUDED IN ROMANS 16?

★ ROMANS CHAPTER 16 IS NOT JUST A LIST OF NAMES ★

If that is our conclusion, we have missed THE KEY POINT OF THE CHAPTER ... what we have in CHAPTER 16 IS A DESCRIPTION OF A VIBRANT CHURCH. THE CHURCH IS MADE UP OF PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE LOVING AND CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER.

It may interest you to know that about 35% of those mentioned are women. Women played active and important roles in the early-New Testament Church. Also, the early church met in homes and functioned as *an extended, spiritual family*.

Now THE CHURCH was in ROME before any EDIFICE existed that today we might call A CHURCH. *So an obvious lesson for ECCLESIOLOGY is — the early-Church was flexible and organic rather than static, organizational, and institutional in nature.*

If you look at the history of FAITH through the ages, you will discover a disturbing trend: ‘*FAITH that begins as a simple, pure FAITH, always seems to trend toward INSTITUTIONALIZATION.*’ The Faith of Abraham and his sons was a life-of-faith that impacted how they worshipped, how they chose wives for their sons, and how they were to interact with the surrounding, pagan culture of the Canaanites. Soon after the end of the Period of the Judges, the theocracy became a Monarchy ... and by the time of Jesus, the pure faith of Abraham had become an institution: the religious Institution of JUDAISM.

And lest you think CHRISTIANITY is immune to this INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FAITH, consider how the FAITH of the early church, *a FAITH marked by simplicity, fellowship, and mutual care – a FAITH focused on gospel-proclamation* – became THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, ‘*mirroring in kind*’ the same trek ABRAHAM’S FAITH took into JUDAISM.

It took until THE 4TH CENTURY (313 A.D. to be exact) under CONSTANTINE, for this INSTITUTIONALIZATION to take place fully – but take place it did. We see the incursion of POLITICS (*in the form of the State Church*) ... And by THE EARLY 4TH CENTURY we see AN ORGANIZATION OF STRUCTURED HIERARCHY (*made up of Bishops and Councils, etc.*) promoting SACRAMENTAL CONTROL ... *i.e., the institutional authority claiming Grace is channeled to the people through THE ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTION by means of THE SACRAMENTS.*

² F.F. Bruce was a Scottish evangelical scholar and the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester from 1959 until 1978.

Of course, this led to THE REFORMATION – An improvement over INSTITUTIONALIZED CATHOLICISM, but a movement not immune to DENOMINATIONALISM.

THIS IS NOT THE CHURCH PAUL PRESENTS TO US IN ROMANS 16: THE EARLY CHURCH WAS A SPIRITUAL FAMILY (vss. 4-5, 10-11, 14-15). *And institutions do not make good families.*

WHY IS THERE NO VERSE 24 IN THE ESV OR WHY IS VERSE 24 IN MY NASB IN BRACKETS?

If you are looking at A KJV TRANSLATION ... you will see A VERSE 24 that reads: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all – Amen.*” Notice the similarity of that sentence with the latter half of VERSE 20: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*”

If you have AN NASB or AN NIV you may see an almost identical sentence – VERSE 24 – [in brackets.] While in other cases, you may see the text skip from VERSE 23 to VERSE 25 with no mention of A VERSE 24. This is because VERSE 24 does not appear in the better Greek manuscripts.

Some day we should discuss manuscripts and why there are variations in what is included in various English translations – I say this because there is a lot of ‘noise’ on the Internet about modern translations ‘*deleting*’ or ‘*omitting*’ verses in a covert effort to distort Scripture. This criticism is levied almost exclusively by ‘KING JAMES ONLY’ websites. Suffice it to say for now, this allegation is *ridiculous*, and though there are bad translations of the Bible, the translators of THE NASB, THE NIV, and THE ESV are *NOT* covertly distorting Scripture. *We will deal with this issue in some depth at another time.*

(THE ISSUE AT HAND IS) **HOW IS AUTHORITY DELEGATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH:**

All authority originates with GOD THE FATHER, who delegates authority according to His own good pleasure. IN GENESIS distinctions regarding role and function are linked to the order of creation and therefore are not derived from culture – something that is made clear in the chapter preceding 1 TIMOTHY 3.

Scripture presents a complementarian view of authority in the New Testament church, emphasizing that all authority originates with God the Father and is delegated according to His own good pleasure. Key points include:

1. Delegated Authority in Home and Church:

- Authority structures in the family and church reflect God's design.
- Family: God → Husband → Wife → Parents → Children
- Church: God → Jesus Christ → Apostles (no longer in effect) → Elders → Deacons → Congregants

2. Biblical Basis:

- Authority distinctions are grounded in creation order, not culture (*Genesis, 1 Timothy 2–3*).
- The Office of Deacon (*Acts 6*) arose to handle practical needs (*e.g., financial aid to widows*), freeing the Apostles the Elders to focus on teaching.

3. Leadership Structure:

- A binary leadership pattern for Elders and Deacons is affirmed in multiple churches (*Philippians, Ephesus, Jerusalem, etc.*).
- The idea of women serving in the official role of Deaconess is contested based on scriptural clarity – See the list of occurrences of the terms **diákonos** (*noun: servant / deacon*), **diakonía** (*noun: service / ministry*), and **diakonéō** (*verb: to serve or minister*) below.

4. Key Verses on Authority:

- Even Jesus operated under delegated authority from God the Father (*John 5:19, 8:28, 12:49; Matthew 28:18*).
- This shows functional subordination, not inequality in essence, even within the Trinity.

5. Women in Church Leadership:

- Romans 16:1– Is the primary verse used to argue for female deacons, but Phoebe’s service to the church was a matter of function, not an official office.
- Paul and Jesus both selected only men for formal leadership roles (Disciples, Apostles, etc.).
- Scripture does not present any clear example of women holding authoritative teaching or ruling roles over men – in fact, it is prohibited by Scripture (*1 Timothy 2:12*).

6. Conclusion:

- Authority in both the home and church is delegated, not innate.
- Decisions about gender roles should be Scripture-driven, not culturally influenced.
- The push for women in ecclesiastical authority is viewed as culturally driven and lacks firm biblical support.