

ROMANS: RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH FROM START TO FINISH

XI. Paul's Edifying Concluding Remarks, Romans 15:14-16:27

C. Paul's Informative Words On The "Deaconess" Issue

(Romans 16:1-2 et al.)

I. Introduction

- A. After showing how God's righteousness is applied by faith from start to finish (cf. Romans 1:16-17) in Romans 1:18-15:13, the Apostle Paul gave his longest concluding remarks in any of his epistles in Scripture in Romans 15:14-16:27, remarks that apply God's righteousness in the godly believer in various practical ways.
- B. One significant result of God's righteousness applied to a believer is how it affects the role of women in the Church. Paul's words on this topic in Romans 16:1-2 and other passages are important for us to heed today:

II. Paul's Informative Words On The "Deaconess" Issue, Romans 16:1-2 et al.

- A. Since Paul wrote the epistle of Romans in Corinth, he sent it to Rome by a woman named Phoebe who was from Cenchrea, a seaport a few miles east of Corinth, Romans 16:1-2; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 499.
- B. Paul identified her as "a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Romans 16:1 KJV), and a big debate has occurred over the meaning the Greek noun that the KJV translated "servant" in that verse (as follows):
 - 1. The Greek word for "servant" is *diakonon* (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 574), and it is used in the New Testament (a) **either** for the **office** of **deacon** (as in Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12) **or** in a **general** sense as a **servant** who performs **any type of service**. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.; John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, 1975, vol. II, p. 226)
 - 2. Determining which definition applies here produces very contrasting roles for women in the local church:
 - a. If Phoebe was a "deaconess" officer in the Church, she would have had authority over others, and that rubs against Paul's directive in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 that a woman not be allowed to exercise authority over a man nor to teach him, but to be in subjection and to make homemaking her primary focus in life.
 - b. However, if Phoebe was a mere servant of the Church at Cenchrea in the sense of devoting herself to caring for needy believers as a caregiver, there is no conflict with Paul's 1 Timothy 2:12-15 directive.
 - 3. To discern the meaning of *diakonon* in Romans 16:1, we note the context of Scripture (as follows):
 - a. Paul urged the believers at Rome to accept Phoebe **not** based on an **office** she had held as a "**deaconess**," but based on her meeting the needs of other believers, including Paul himself, Romans 16:2c. To help such a helper was thus only fitting for the saints in Rome to whom Paul was writing, Romans 16:2b.
 - b. Also, in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 where Paul discussed putting godly widows on the church's financial support role, he gave their qualifications as including (+) their having brought up children, (+) their having washed the saints' feet, (+) their having relieved the afflicted, and (+) their having diligently followed every good work with no comment on their having served or not served in an office of "deaconess." (Ibid., Murray)
 - c. In addition, Paul's explanation in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 for the role of women in the local church as being one of submission to men contrasts sharply with the idea of an **office** of "**deaconess**":
 - i. Paul's first reason for having men in authority over women is based on creation: he stated that Adam was first formed, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:13), and from the Genesis 2:20-24 text on that event, we note that Eve was created to be the helper to Adam, not vice-versa! Thus, one cannot claim that women were made subject to men only after mankind's fall into sin, for the created order of mankind prior to their Genesis 3 fall into sin still directed that men be in authority over women!
 - ii. Paul also stated that the woman was deceived where Adam willfully sinned, not being deceived, implying that women need to be under men because women are more vulnerable to being deceived simply due to the different way God made women than how He made men, 1 Timothy 2:14.
 - iii. The key role of women is to be homemaking, 1 Tim. 2:15. They may hold jobs as did the Proverbs 31:16 virtuous woman, but their key role is not to be officiating in the church, but homemaking!
 - 4. It is thus best to take *diakonon* in Romans 16:1 to mean "servant" in the **general** sense, **not** an **office** of "**deaconess**," and Paul's call that women be subject to men in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 stands uncompromised.

Lesson: *Phoebe was a general servant of the church at Cenchrea who carried Paul's epistle of Romans to Rome from Corinth, and Paul commended her for her having met the needs of the saints at Cenchrea. There was no "office" of "deaconess" in the Early Church, for women were under the authority of men at home and at church.*

Application: *May we heed the role of women in the home, in society and in the church as taught by God's Word.*