

Phoebe
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Letters of introduction, commending the person, and introducing their favorable regards and attentions was common. Luke heralds example. A certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus. He was mighty in the scriptures. He was minded to pass over into Achaia. The brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. When he was come, he helped them much (Acts 18: 24 & 27 ASV portioned). Entering Macedonia Paul raises the question. I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ. A door was opened to me in the Lord. I had no relief for my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother. Taking leave, I went forth into Macedonia. Are we beginning to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you (II Corinthians 2: 12-13 & 3:1 ASV portioned)? Mention of Phoebe leaves it beyond doubt she was bearer of the epistle, or accompanied those who bore it to Rome. With the apostle's commendation, its bearer was introduced to the Roman Christians. I commend to you Phoebe our sister, a servant of the church that is at Cenchreae. Receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you. She herself has been a helper of many, and of mine own self (Romans 16: 1-2 ASV portioned).

The letter of introduction tells the Roman Christians:

1. Phoebe is our sister, a member of the Christian church.
2. This is the only mention of a church at Cenchrea. This was the sea-port of Corinth. Corinth was situated on the middle of the isthmus, and had two harbours, or ports: Cenchrea on the east, about eight or nine miles from the city; and Lechaeum on the west. Cenchrea opened into the Aegean Sea, and was the principal port. It was on this isthmus, between these two ports, that the Isthmian games were celebrated, to which the apostle refers so often in his epistles.

3. Servant translates from the Greek, deaconess. It is clear there was an order of women known as deaconesses. A class of females whose duty was to teach other females. They appear to have been commonly aged. Experienced widows, sustaining a fair reputation, fitted to guide and instruct those who were young and inexperienced. Honor widows that are widows indeed. Her hope set on God, continues in supplications and prayers night and day. Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she brought up children, if she used hospitality to strangers, if she washed the saints' feet, if she relieved the afflicted, if she diligently followed every good work (I Timothy 5:3-10 ASV portioned). That they may train the young women to love their husband, to love their children, to be sober-minded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husband, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Titus 2:4-5 ASV).

Caius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, called Pliny, a Roman aristocrat and *counsul suffectus* had reputation as a lawyer. Pliny was governor of Bythania A.D. 112, just before his death. His claim to fame was his collection of ten volumes of literary letters. Exquisitely written epistles, cover all manner of subjects, from eruption of Vesuvius to the famous description of the Christian Church in Bythania. In his celebrated letter to Marcus Ulpius Traianus, Trajan, who after a distinguished military career became Emperor, Pliny, says, when speaking of the efforts which he made to obtain information respecting the opinions and practices of Christians, I deemed it necessary to put two maid-servants who are called ministrae [that is, deaconesses] to the torture, in order to ascertain what is the truth (The Apostolical Constitutions, Book iii).

Deaconesses were confined to these offices, never regarded an order of ministers, or suffered to preach to congregations. Scripture teaches permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not

beguiled, but the woman being beguiled had fallen into transgression: she shall be saved through her child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety (I Timothy 2: 12-15 ASV portioned).

There can have been no time in the Christian Church when the work of women was not of infinite value. It must have been specially so in the days of the early church. Reasons of their appointment were:

1. The females were usually separate from the men. They were kept secluded, for the most part, and not permitted to mingle in society with men, as is the custom now.
2. It became necessary, to appoint aged and experienced females to instruct the young.
3. Baptism by total immersion.
4. Visitation of the sick.
5. Distribution of food to the poor.

Women have a big part in the life and work of the Christian Church. Confined to these offices, they were never suffered to preach to congregations. God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. In all Christian Churches, let the women keep silence. It is not permitted them to speak. Let them be in subjection. If they would learn anything, let them ask their own husband at home. It is shameful for a woman to speak in the church (I Corinthians 14: 33-35 ASV portioned). Sin is coming short of the glory of God. It is not my business to contest it. It is my business to avoid it. Seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness.

Paul asks the church of God at Rome to welcome Phoebe as God's dedicated people ought to welcome each other. There should be no strangers in the family of Christ. We are sons and daughters of one father and therefore brothers and sisters of each other. It is possible for church organization to become a little cliquish, almost a closed society, which is not really interested in welcoming the stranger. When the stranger comes among us, welcome each other.