

Parson to Person
ROMANS 16 PART 1

“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus and

Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you” (Romans 16:1–16 NKJV)

And...

“Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Romans 16:21–24 NKJV).

In the text above we will give attention to three specific subjects. They are:

- 1) Phoebe, a Servant of the Church**
- 2) Priscilla and Aquila, A Husband and Wife Ministry Team**
- 3) The Importance of Recognizing Those Who Served Paul, and with Paul**

1) Phoebe, a Servant of the Church

The fact that Phoebe was indeed a “servant” of the church has inspired several questions about women in ministry—for the word servant used here is *διάκονον*: diakonos: deacon. However, the use of the word deacon or servant must be distinguished from the

office of deacon. Moreover, there is no word for deaconess in Greek.

The office of deacon as described in the Scriptures includes attributes where Phoebe would naturally be disqualified. She was not and could not have been a woman holding the office of deacon.

When the early Church needed deacons (attending to the oversight of domestic duties), they developed the “office.” We read, “...*brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business*” (Acts 6:3 NKJV). In 1 Timothy we read that, “...*deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well*” (1 Timothy 3:8–12 NKJV). Therefore, we see that one holding the office of deacon must be a “husband”—a man.

The Bible does validate places of ministry for women in the Church. Ministry gifts are given to both men and women! One will quickly notice (when reading the Bible) that there were great women who influenced the national health and safety of Israel (Deborah—Judges 4-5, Esther—

the Book of Esther, Ruth—the Book of Ruth, etc.), invested in the lives of great men and women (Acts 18, Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16, etc.), provided instruction to other women, taught and served their own children and the children of others, managed their homes (1 Timothy 5, Titus 2), served the church in varying capacities, and contributed to local and otherwise national society. However, according to sound biblical teaching and model, the office of deacon, elder, pastor, etc., is male.

2) Priscilla and Aquila, A Husband and Wife Ministry Team

Aquila and Priscilla were a husband and wife team of Jewish tent makers Paul met in Corinth. Upon his arrival to the city of Corinth he stayed with them and apparently shared and explained the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. It is apparent they trusted Christ for salvation by virtue of the fact that they ministered the Gospel to Apollos in Ephesus (see Acts 18) and hosted a church in their home (see vs. 3–5 and 1 Corinthians 16:19). Here in our text we also see that these two were faithful to the point of risking their own lives for Paul. We know nothing of this in the Scriptures but the comment made here.

Of interest to some is the fact that in the text of Scripture two of five times Priscilla's name precedes Aquila's. This has no more significance than the gracious acknowledgement and greeting style given when

appropriate. Otherwise mentions are given with Aquila first as head of household.

Some contend that the name reversals suggest that Paul and others embraced Egalitarianism (total gender neutralization and a belief in total equality without bias). I find no credibility in this. The Bible does strongly support Complementarianism (the view that men and women have different but complementary roles— *“it is not good for man to be alone”*) but clearly rejects the belief that there is no distinction between the genders and/or gender-specific roles in the Church, the family, society, etc. Feminism (the agenda designed to maximize the fullness of Egalitarianism) and Egalitarianism has been a plague in society, and in particular—the Church. Moreover, Chauvinism (the belief that one’s gender makes them superior or of more value, worth, etc., than those of the opposite sex) like Egalitarianism and Feminism are not biblically-supported positions. Complementarianism is! Therefore, reading into Paul’s (Holy Spirit inspired) name sequence must be avoided. Aquila and Priscilla were husband and wife, and together they “complemented” one another in ministry.

3) The Importance of Recognizing Those Who Served Paul, and with Paul

Paul sought to recognize individuals who served the Lord—and in particular those who had been a blessing to

him. He noted both men and women by name—which is of considerable interest to me. People matter to God, and must matter to all of us. Those who serve with us in ministry (meaning all of you/us) must be remembered—not used. We are co-laborers in the Lord and are of great value. We need one another in order to function as a healthy body. This is another form of complementarianism!

Paul explained the unity of the Church body and its cooperative servanthood when he said, *“But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary...that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually”* (1 Corinthians 12:20–27 abridged). Herein we see then that if one part of the body is self-serving, the whole of the body suffers.

I pray that the Lord will enable us, by His grace, to be mindful of one another, recognize one another, and that we might serve one another, for the glory of God.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul