

Romans 16:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

Analysis

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea—Synistēmi de hymin Phoibēn tēn adelphēn hēmōn, ousan kai diakonon tēs ekklēsias tēs en Kenchreais (συνιστημι δε υμιν Φοιβην την ἀδελφην ἡμων, ουσαν και διακονον της ἐκκλησιας της ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς). Synistēmi (συνιστημι, commend/introduce) is formal recommendation language, common in ancient letters. Phoebe carried Paul's letter to Rome, requiring trustworthy character. Diakonon (διάκονος, servant/deacon) is the same word used for male deacons (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8)—Phoebe held official church office, not generic 'helper.'

Cenchrea was Corinth's eastern port, about 7 miles from the city. Phoebe's role as diakonos indicates recognized ministry—likely teaching, administrating, serving the congregation. Paul's commendation to Rome's church implies she had authority to represent him and expound his letter—suggesting women served in teaching and leadership roles in the early church. Adelphēn (sister) emphasizes spiritual family, equal standing in Christ regardless of gender (Galatians 3:28).

Historical Context

Phoebe's title diakonos sparked debate over women's roles in ministry. Some translations render it 'servant' for Phoebe but 'deacon' for men—revealing bias, not linguistics. Early church evidence shows women served as deacons: Pliny the Younger (AD 112) mentions interrogating female deacons. Later church orders

restricted women's roles, but Romans 16:1 shows first-century practice was more egalitarian. Phoebe's commendation, combined with Priscilla (v. 3), Junia (v. 7), and others, demonstrates women's prominent ministry in Paul's mission.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Phoebe's title '*diakonon*' (deacon) challenge or affirm your understanding of women's roles in church leadership?
2. What does it mean that Phoebe likely carried and explained Paul's theological masterpiece (Romans) to the Roman church?
3. How can churches today honor and utilize gifted women in ministry as Paul commended Phoebe?

Interlinear Text

Συνίστημι	δὲ	ὑμῖν	Φοίβην	τῆς	ἀδελφὴν	ἡμῶν	οὗσαν
I command	G1161	unto you	Phebe	which	sister	our	which is
G4921		G5213	G5402	G3588	G79	G2257	G5607

διάκονον	τῆς	ἐκκλησίας	τῆς	ἐν	Κεγχρεαῖς
a servant	which	of the church	which	is at	Cenchrea
G1249	G3588	G1577	G3588	G1722	G2747

Additional Cross-References

Acts 18:18 (Parallel theme): And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

2 Corinthians 3:1 (Parallel theme): Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?

James 2:15 (Parallel theme): If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,