

# FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

Established 1953

July/August 2017

Volume 51, Number 4

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation ~ Romans 1:16

## WINDOW-DRESSING PHEBE

Barry O'Dell

*Window-dressing* is defined, "something used to create a deceptively favorable or attractive impression." This edition of FCGN is going to deal very specifically with passages of the New Testament that speak to us concerning the role of women in the church. Phebe, mentioned but once in the Bible (Rom. 16:1-2), is used as *window-dressing* by those who advocate a role for women in the church that God never did. Paul wrote of this godly woman, "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also" (Rom. 16:1-2). Notice the high praise given to this servant of the Lord: "sister," showing the familial relationship to other Christians (Gal. 3:26-29); "servant," showing that she was simply imitating Jesus Himself (Mk. 10:44-45); "succourer," indicating that she took care of those in need and was a leader in helping others as all Christians are commanded to do (Gal. 6:10).

So how is this godly, faithful woman used in an effort to push an agenda not found in Scripture? She was a *servant*. Looking at the Greek New Testament the word *diakonos* (deacon) jumps out at the reader! And for many, it has not only jumped out at them, but it has overtaken their thinking! Some make the claim that Phebe was an "official" deaconess of the church. Does Scripture warrant that conclusion?

Here are two arguments used in favor of Phebe being an official *deaconess* in the church, and, in turn, the same taking place for women in the church today. (1) "Some commentators say she was a deaconess." Moses Lard wrote in his conclusion on Romans 16:1, "I am, therefore, of the opinion that Phebe was a deaconess in the official sense of that word." (2) "There are some translations of the New Testament that call her a deaconess" – Alexander Campbell's *The Living Oracles* is often cited as proof. Because of limited space I will deal with these two points. If anyone has any further questions on this subject, please, feel free to contact me through the email address on the back of this paper.

"Some commentators believe that she was a deaconess." First, let us deal with the word *diakonon*. It means simply, "a minister, a servant, an attendant."

The English term "deacon" is found five times in the New Testament (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 10, 12-13). In each case noted the term is used in an "official" sense, referring to the "office of a deacon" as clarified by the requirements found in First Timothy 3:8-13. *Servant* and *minister* are terms found many times throughout the New Testament. No less than eighty-two times are they translated from the Greek word *diakonos* in either verb or noun form! Note the individuals referred to as *diakonos* – Jesus (Mk. 10:45), Barnabas and Saul (Acts 12:25), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), Tychicus (Col. 4:7), Timothy (1 Thes. 3:2), angels (Heb. 1:14), government officials (Rom. 13:4). Why is it that only Phebe is singled out as an "official" deacon in the church? Does this not indicate an agenda by those who do so? Do we allow commentators to dictate our beliefs and practices? Moses Lard, for example, wrote a full page on Romans 16:1 yet provided not one Scripture upon which to base his concluding "opinion."

**"I commend unto you Phebe our sister..."**

"There are some translations that call her a deaconess." That is true. Why would some translations use the term *deaconess*? The Greek

term was simply brought over into the English language using similar letters (transliteration). The same was done with other words – baptize (*baptidzo*) and apostle (*apostolos*) being two examples. While bringing the word into another language, this practice does not define the word being used. A deacon is "a servant, a minister, an attendant" by basic definition. There are, however, five specific uses of the term that refer to the "official" work of a deacon in the church (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 10, 12-13). Also, there are specific instructions for appointing elders and deacons, yet we find none for a deaconess. Paul addressed "all the saints...with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). Why did he not address the deaconesses? As JB Coffman noted, "Those who appoint deaconesses must do so without a clear mandate and without a scriptural list of what their qualifications should be."

Please, do not misunderstand this article! In no way is Phebe being made inferior or worth less than any other servant of God! All of Christ's followers are called to be *diakonos* (Matt. 20:26). She was a wonderful helper to Paul and many others. Many churches today would be in great trouble were it not for the faithful, godly, working women! However, to use arguments such as the two here noted, is simply window-dressing and not being honest with the Biblical text.

**IF SHE LED, CAN I?***Tony Brewer*

Perhaps one of the most heated discussions one can have in regard to the doctrine of the Bible is gender roles and leadership. What can a woman do? Some greatly limit the role of women in the church binding grievous burdens well beyond that which God has bound. On the other hand, some have loosed from the bounds of Holy Writ the restrictions placed upon women concerning their roles to such a point that we now have formerly sound institutions of higher learning "rethinking" gender roles in relation to leadership. Friends, we must rest upon the Bible.

When going to the Bible for answers concerning gender role and leadership in the Lord's church one must view everything, from Genesis to Revelation, through Paul's words to Timothy, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (1 Tim. 2:8)" and "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Tim. 2:12)." Verse eight sets the context of location - an assembling of men and women - and verse twelve gives the limitation to the role of subservience during this assembling. So, from this one passage it is evident that a woman must not usurp the authority given to a man. There can be no other passage of Scripture which can contradict this one. Paul's words to Timothy shall be the spectacles through which we will examine some supposed accounts of women leading in the Old Testament which are erroneously used to justify women in leadership in the Lord's church.

"Women in the Old Testament led so I can, right?" Well, yes, there accounts of women leading in the Old Testament. There are three instances that bear mentioning. The daughters of Zelophehad recorded in Numbers 26-27, Deborah recorded in Judges 4, and the account of Esther. The real question is this: Is there authority for us concerning female leadership in the Lord's church contained in these accounts?

The Daughters of Zelophehad - It is interesting that this example is cited when it comes to trying to justify a woman leading the the Lord's church. There is no real parallel. We find out that Zelophehad died leaving no heir (Num. 26:33). This is a seemly extraneous detail until we get to the next chapter. The daughters of Zelophehad, evidently, were about to be left with nothing because there was no inheritance provision for when there was no male heir. So, they pleaded their case unto Moses, Eleazar the priest, the princes, and all the congregation (Num. 27:2). This was not an issue of a woman stepping into a leadership position. These women came to the leaders in submissiveness seeking help. Moses did not usurp authority either. He brought their petition before God

(Num. 27:5). Now, something interesting happened here - God amended the Law (Num. 27:7-11). To use this as an example for having women leaders in the Lord's church is to claim direct revelation from God in order to countermand easily understood Scripture from the pen of Paul. There is no authority for female leadership here.

Deborah, the Judge and Prophetess - One does not have to go any further than Deborah's admonition to Barak to see that there is no authority here for women leadership. Barak was to lead an army and, with God's help, defeat Sisera, the captain of the host of Canaan (Jud. 4:1,6). As it turns out, Barak did not want to go unless Deborah went with him (Jud. 4:8). Because of Barak's reluctance we have the admonition of Deborah, "And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh (Jud. 4:9). It seems that God used the idea of assigned gender roles to put to shame Barak. Even though the children of Israel went to Deborah to inquire of God she was not a leader (Jud. 4:5). In fact, she cites a commandment from God which may or may not have come from her in the first place (Jud. 4:6). Based on the fact that it was shameful for Barak to have Deborah

with him in battle, and the fact that the original commandment might not have come from Deborah, we can bind nothing here covering female leadership in the Lord's church.

Esther, the Queen - Esther was not in a leadership role. In fact, she only went in to the king at great risk and had to be convinced by Mordecai to do so (Est. 4:10-14). Also, notice how she approached her king as she is trying to save the Jews from genocide. She went before the king in a very humble and submissive manner asking for Haman and the king to come to a banquet (Est. 5:4). Again, she asks in a very humble manner while pleading for the life of her people (Est. 7:3-4). One last time, Esther pleaded with the king with tears asking to write a law that would reverse the mischief of Haman (Est. 8:3-5). Of course, the lesson is that meekness and humility will win over arrogance and pride. The king allowed the mischief to be reversed and the day was saved because a woman did not lead nor usurp authority over a man. There is no authority here for leadership by women in the Lord's church. Esther was the picture of a godly woman. She did not lead. She submitted in more ways than one.

Advocates for female leadership in the Lord's church need to stay out of the Old Testament. All that is needed is the commandments of the Lord by the pen of Paul (1 Cor. 14:37). "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Tim. 2:12)."

*Tony preaches for the Bay church of Christ in Bay, AR*

***"Is there authority for us today concerning women's leadership in the Lord's church?"***

**GENDER ROLES AND GALATIANS 3:28***Rick Lawson*

It can be difficult to stand for truth when it is unpopular. The world around us seems to be constantly drifting further away from God, and ignorance of the Bible is at an all-time high. Shall believers buckle and compromise when society does not like what God has taught in His holy Word? Shall they go-along-to-get-along with those who want things their way instead of God's way? Sadly, many have done just that. In the past few years, women have been featured as speakers on the Pepperdine lectureship (some who are not even Christians!). Also, churches of Christ in New York and Tennessee have recently taken on female "preaching interns." Only in the last few years have Christians seen women preachers delivering sermons to mixed-gender audiences. There are blogs and websites devoted to forcing the false doctrine of "gender role equality" upon churches of Christ. How have things gotten to where they are, and does Galatians 3:28 remove gender roles in the Church?

***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." - Galatians 3:28***

In 1859, early feminist and Salvation Army co-founder, Catherine Booth wrote a pamphlet entitled "*Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel*." Therein she wrote of Galatians 3:28, "...in the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of Christ's Kingdom, all differences of nation, caste, and sex are abolished. . ." This interpretation is identical to many modernists who seek the dissolution of biblical roles for men and women among churches of Christ. If this were a proper interpretation, it would contradict later inspired writings of the Apostle. Most biblical scholars recognize Galatians as the earliest of Paul's inspired letters. Estimates of its date of writing range from 40-50 AD. This is understandable because the Judaizing teachers were one of the earliest threats to the Gentile churches (see Acts 15). In letters penned later, Paul would emphasize the distinct roles of men and women in the worship of the church. For instance, when women speaking out in the worship services was causing disturbance in the church at Corinth, Paul gave a clear solution: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (I Cor. 14:34-35). The argument might be made that this particular circumstance could not apply to modern women preachers, but no one could deny that women preaching or teaching over men is causing disturbance among the brotherhood right now! The first Corinthian letter was written years after Galatians. Did Paul contradict himself in Galatians 3 and First Corinthians 14?

***"...does Galatians 3:28 remove gender roles in the church?"***

Even later Paul would write, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim. 2:11-12). This was written in 56 or early 57 AD. This instruction was not written due to specific circumstances, but as a more general command. Consideration of the immediate context shows that the order of creation and the first sin is the reason for this restriction God placed upon womankind. This is important because it clearly shows that it is neither a lack of talent, nor cultural norms that keep women from preaching over men. To the contrary, godly women have always been extremely talented, critical to the success of the Church, and have provided leadership in many areas of work. Godly women, however, recognize the limits God has placed on them.

Examining the context of Galatians 3 is critical to understanding the true meaning of verse 28. False teachers were attempting to bind circumcision and other fragments of the Mosaic Law upon the Christians in the area of Galatia. God's response was to remind them that those who have faith in Christ (a working obedient faith) are justified by that faith and not the Law of Moses (v. 11). Paul also showed the connection that these Gentile believers had to

Abraham through Christ (v.14), the Seed (v.16). The law was given by God for an important purpose, and its purpose being fulfilled, man is under it no more (vs. 24-25). The culminating message of the

Holy Spirit is found in verses 26 and 27: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." What a beautiful and important thought! Then, as now, those who obey the gospel through faith and are baptized into Jesus Christ have become children of God. When Paul penned verse twenty eight, it was not to remove distinctions between men and women, any more than he removed every possible difference between Jew and Gentile, or masters and slaves. The truth he revealed is that in Christ, all are to recognize the value of every soul, and view one another as part of one great spiritual family in Christ. Similar language is found in many other passages. Please study Galatians 5:6, Romans 10:12, I Corinthians 12:13, and Colossians 3:11, just to name a few.

The proper roles for males and females in the church have been determined and described by God through His divine Word. Men are to serve as elders (I Tim. 3:1-2) and deacons (I Tim. 3:12). Preaching over men in a mixed audience is restricted to men only (I Tim. 2:12). The church can allow neither the modern attitudes of feminism, nor ungodly liberalism, to tamper with God's plan. His plan is perfect, because He is perfect. When man tampers with perfection, he only diminishes or destroys it. May God's people always respect His restrictions, glorify His name, and obey His divine plan!

*Rick preaches for the Adairsville church of Christ  
in Adairsville, GA*

July/August 2017 Contributors

**Churches of Christ**

Pilot (Mammoth Spring, AR)	\$700.00
Dellhalf (Myrtle, MO)	\$300.00
Bakersfield (Bakersfield, MO)	\$200.00
Crossroads (Gepp, AR)	\$200.00
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*Biblical Worship*

*-Colossians 3:17-*

- Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24)
- Prayer (Acts 12:5; Phil. 4:6-7)
- Vocal music only (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15)
- Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7-8)
- Preaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7)

*The Churches of Christ*

- Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)
- Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13)

*Salvation*

- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

**Fulton County Gospel News**

USPS Publication #211780

...is a periodical publication issued bimonthly by the church of Christ at Third & Bethel (PO Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251.

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This paper is supported by voluntary contributions for which we are grateful. Financial information will be furnished upon request.

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Church of Christ  
PO Box 251  
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Periodical Postage Paid At  
Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-9998  
Publication #211780