



# THE EXHORTER

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***“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40***

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## Jump Start # 1545

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**Romans 16:1** *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receiver her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and that you help her in whatever matters she may have need of; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well."*

The other day I was putting together some of our Jump Start books for a reader who had requested them. One of our booklets is entitled, "Male Leadership." I wrote those articles over 1,000 Jump Starts ago. I remember at the time someone saying, "you ought to write something about women." So, today, we begin by looking at Phoebe, the commendable servant.

Women in God's kingdom often feel at a loss as to what they can and cannot do. Modern churches that are forever looking forward and not backward to God's word, no longer struggle in this area. Women preachers, women in leadership roles are common today. Many of the best known "Christian" authors are women. But those who are interested in the Biblical pattern, understand that there are limitations upon the role of women. Some have considered restrictions such as in Timothy, where a women is not to teach or have authority over a man, to be cultural. As culture has shifted and changed, so ought those restrictions. The difficulty with this line of thinking is just what is cultural and what is a mandate from Heaven. Who decides?

Many women feel second place in the kingdom. They feel that they do not have a voice. They feel so limited and pushed to the background that they truly feel inferior. It shouldn't be this way. So man men are chauvinists and that is expressed in their hurtful attitudes and comments.

So let's consider a few thoughts.

First, although there were no women apostles, God did not consider them to be secondary. The first witnesses to the resurrection of Christ were women. It is reported that way in the Gospels. In that time, a woman's testimony didn't mean much in legal circumstances, but God included women. It was the women who first saw and first reported the resurrection of Christ.

Second, some of the greatest demonstrations of faith came from women. The Gentile woman who was willing to settle for the crumbs that fell from the children's table, demonstrated great faith in the Lord. The woman with the issue of blood, who by faith, touched Jesus, believing she would be healed. Mary, who anointed Jesus with costly perfume before His death, demonstrated that she knew and that she believed.

Third, it was the wealthy women that supported Jesus and the disciples as they traveled teaching and healing the sick. It was the women who made it possible for these things.

Fourth, God sent Jesus into the womb of a woman. Mary carried Jesus and then cared for Jesus and followed Him all of her life. God didn't bypass this process. Jesus didn't arrive on earth a grown man. A woman was chosen to be the instrument in which Jesus would come.

(OVER)

Fifth, as in our verse today, Paul recognized the valuable role of women in the kingdom. The list in Romans 16 includes the names of several women. They worked hard. They risked their necks. They had the church in their homes. They served where they could and they made a difference.

Today, the backbone of so many congregations is women. They are the ones who come, carrying their babies. They are the ones who show up every night of preaching. They are the ones who fill the classes. They are strong, faithful to the Lord and are willing to put elbow grease into whatever they can do. On many occasions, we preachers look out into an audience and see so many women that we wonder where are the men? They are tired. They had to work. They are out hunting. They do not believe. But here are the women. They know their Bibles and they know the Lord.

Some of the earliest Bible class teachers I remember were women. Faithful women such as Mae and Audrey were patient with kids like me. They opened the world to us about our amazing God. And every place I have preached there have been remarkable women such as Edith and Wilma and Jerri and Fae and the JoAnn's, who loved the Lord and who did so much to help the congregation.

Our verse shows Paul commending Phoebe. She heads the list of all those names that Paul will thank. She's first. A woman is at the top of the list. She served. She was the servant of the church. Many get real excited about that word "servant." It's from the same word we get "deacon," and immediately they want to assign Phoebe to the role of deacon to get a foot in the door of leadership and position.

Not every servant is a deacon. I serve and I'm not a deacon. I can tell you the names of dozens of people, both male and female, who are busy in the kingdom but they don't wear a title. They simply serve. Jesus himself was a servant, but He wasn't a deacon, as we think about that specific role in the church. Second, those that say such things do not understand the concept of deacons nor elders. They feel that deacon is a higher position than a "regular" member. They see it as a stepping stone and one promotion away from being an elder. Such thinking is nonsense and unbiblical. Deacons are faithful men who can be trusted to serve a congregation. That's it. That's all. They are not better than others. They are not in line to be elders. The eldership is not a promotion from deacons. Get that business model out of the church. It ruins it. Phoebe served. I see in the Gospels that Martha served the Lord. She served food on several occasions. Some folks can't do a thing unless there is a title and a paycheck that comes with it. The spirit of serving has been lost. Helping out others, because it's the right thing to do, is what we all should be doing. If you are not serving, you are not doing right. All of us need to be serving one another. Devoted to one another is what Paul said earlier in Romans.

So, our Phoebe served. Served what? Food? Maybe. Maybe she housed the preachers who traveled. Many have done that to me. Maybe she saw to the needs of the saints. Maybe she sat with the sick. Maybe she supported the preaching of the gospel. Maybe she told others about Jesus. Maybe she copied and shared the things that Paul taught. Maybe she was the backbone to the church. Maybe she was faithful, dependable and always pointing the way to the word of God. Maybe she did whatever she could.

She did these things without a title. She did these things without a position. But she made a difference. She was noticed by Heaven. She was commended by Paul. She was to be offered help as Paul directed the Romans to help her in whatever way she needs. Paul didn't say, "You women help her." He told the Roman church to help her. She was doing something great and it was getting to be more than she could do. She needed other servants. She needed some help. So, go help her. Don't pitch a fit that "she's a woman." Don't get all messed up about "who's the boss." Don't lose sight of the big picture because there are no titles or positions listed. Just help out. Do what she is doing, serve. Serve others. Serve the kingdom. Serve God.

Some of us men spend too much time talking and not enough time doing. We spend so much time in the huddle discussing great plays, that we miss the game. Some folks love to say, "Here's what we ought to do..." and what they mean is, 'here's what you ought to do.' Not Phoebe. She was a doer. She was a servant. She got busy. There is no indication of any man giving her permission or having to approve of what she was doing nor standing over her to oversee it. No man is named at Cenchrea. There's just Phoebe. And she's a servant.

I wonder if some of us men stand in the way of women like Phoebe. I wonder if we stop what they could be doing. I wonder if it is too hard for some of us to do what Paul did, "commend a woman."

Phoebe, she served. Thank the Lord, for that and for her. Now, are you serving?