

BIOGRAPHIES OF BIBLE SAINTS

VII. Other Exemplary Biblical, Effective "Lay" Christian Ministers

A. Other Effective Women "Lay" Ministers: Phoebe, Rufus' Mother And The Ladies In Stephanas' Family (Romans 16:1-2, 13; 1 Corinthians 16:15-16)

I. Introduction

- A. Ephesians 4:11-12 teaches that God uses the "starter" gifts of [today's] evangelists and pastor-teachers to equip the rest of the Church body to do the actual work of the ministry.
- B. Thus, it is edifying to view the "lay" ministries of Early Church believers in addition to Aquila and Priscilla, and we continue by viewing how God used other women in the Early Church effectively (as follows):

II. Other Effective Women "Lay" Ministers: Phoebe, Rufus' Mother And The Ladies In Stephanas' Family.

- A. Romans 16:1-2 describes the "lay" ministry of Phoebe as that of a Protectress or Patroness of needy believers:
 - 1. Some evangelicals teach that Phoebe was in church leadership in the office of "deaconess," the word *diakonos* being used of her in Romans 16:1 KJV ["servant"]. However, since women were not to exercise authority over men in the Church (1 Timothy 2:12), the definition for this word is "helper." (Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1967, p. 183-184)
 - 2. Paul urged Roman believers to assist her in whatever need she had, for she had been a "succourer" (KJV) (*prostatis*, "a protectress, patroness, helper," Ibid., p. 726) of many (Romans 16:2).
 - 3. Thus, Phoebe had exerted a lot of quality effort to help needy believers by way of providing food, clothing, medical help, etc. as needed to offset poverty or suffering caused by persecution for the faith, and the Apostle directed that other believers assist her in her important work.
- B. Romans 16:13 has the Apostle Paul making reference to Rufus and to Rufus' mother "and mine." We can thus imagine that this woman in a special way exerted extra motherly ministrations toward Paul, providing repair for worn clothes, washing his clothes, cooking and feeding him, getting him to bed to get rest and ministering healing medicines after Paul's many hardships and encouraging him emotionally much as a mother would a son who had endured Paul's hardships of being repeatedly shipwrecked, beaten, stoned and suffering hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness, cf. 2 Corinthians 11:24-27.
- C. 1 Corinthians 16:15-16 speaks of the very special, self-initiated ministry of the "household, family" (*oikia*, Ibid., p. 559-560) of Stephanas, which included the ministries of the ladies of that household and family:
 - 1. This household had "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints," (1 Corinthians 16:15 KJV), the word "addicted" coming from the Greek verb, *tasso* that means "appoint, devote oneself to," Ibid., p. 813.
 - 2. In other words, the ladies with the men in this family, (a) independent of any church official directing them to do so, had (b) seen the needs of believers around them, (c) they had felt burdened about those needs and (d) they had taken the initiative (e) in the leading of the Holy Spirit (f) to assume responsible care for the *diakonia*, the (g) "service, aid, support" (Ibid., p. 183) of such believers in need, 1 Corinthians 16:15.
 - 3. Accordingly, their nurturing ministry so aligned with God's will that believers exercise love in action for one another (cf. 1 John 3:16-18) that the Apostle Paul directed other believers to *hupotasso* them, to "subject" themselves to and to "obey" the household of Stephanas in their work, 1 Corinthians 16:16.
 - 4. The ladies in this household would likely have been involved in this "service, aid and support" of the needy, so their efforts of taking the initiative to meet food, clothing, housing, laundry, etc. needs put them in the ranks of being honored to where other believers were to make room for them to continue their ministries and even to help them address the needs of fellow believers. This household was likely functioning much as a contemporary food pantry or soup kitchen might do so today, but as a household.

Lesson: *The Biblical ministries of Phoebe, Rufus' mother and the ladies of Stephanas' household show that God honors Christian women who (1) independently of even Church leaders (2) take note of believers around them who suffer emotional or material lack, (3) and thus feel burdened about addressing their needs (4) so as to take the initiative (5) under the Holy Spirit's empowering (6) to assume responsible care and (7) provide the service, aid, support, protection or motherly attentiveness needed to meet the needs of such people.*

Application: *If God calls us as Christian women to "lay" ministrations, may we (1) rely on the Holy Spirit to be sensitive to real needs in Christ's body that we can address as women (2) so as to take the initiative to address these needs to edify those in need. (3) In so doing, God will move to provide helpers and supportiveness even from Church leaders for such an effective ministry that fulfills the law of Christ, John 13:35 with 1 John 3:16-18.*