

WHAT'S UP?

1. It is the last chapter of Romans. Being last does not mean unimportance. All of Scripture is profitable (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).
2. So here is a chapter with closing remarks. Thirty-five persons are named in this conclusion. Nine were with Paul, 8 men and one woman, Twenty-four persons were at Rome, 12 men and 7 women. Besides these, there are two households mentioned. There are some unmarried brethren (v. 44) and two unmarried women (vv. 13, 15).
3. Now, look at the opening verses. They are concerned with Phebe. Here's Paul's word about her:

1. WHO PHEBE WAS

- a. Our sister

The name Phebe means bright or radiant. Surely her parents had great expectations of her. God grant our children to be thus for us! Being a sister shows she was a true believer (cf. brethren in 7:1, 4).

- b. A servant of the church

Cenchrea was the eastern harbor of Corinth. The port for vessels from Ephesus and from the coast cities of the Aegean Sea. A church was here--local church. You can't have the invisible church without a local church and vice versa!

Now the term servant is the feminine of the word deacon. It is very likely that Phebe had some official role in the church. Whether she was an official deaconess is not known, but to hold her in a place of no consequence would be wrong. The wife of a deacon had qualifications (1 Tim. 3:11). She may have been an older woman who served as instructed (Titus 2:3-5) whose life was exemplary (1 Tim. 5:5-10). Thus, while it is not clearly stated, it is nonetheless obvious that Phebe was "somebody" in the local church. Let us not forget the role of women in any local assembly.

- c. A succorer of many

This is a feminine noun, the masculine of which means a patron, Phebe had become (Greek) a benefactress of many. The term is an honorable one and suggests she provided service as a superior on inferiors (a patroness). Paul adds that Phebe had assisted him also. She must have been a woman of means. She probably had servants travelling with her. She would not have gone alone.

2. WHAT PHEBE HAD

Simply, a commendation from Paul to the believers at Rome. This was a common practice in the early church (Acts 18:27; 2 Cor. 3:1; 8:18-24; 3 John 9:10). It would be well for the practice to be revived. Some assemblies do it today (cf. Plymouth Brethren). This commendation also suggests that Phebe was the bearer of the Roman letter. Think of it, a woman carried this mighty letter to the center of the Gentile world!

3. HOW PHEBE ARRIVED

a. Received worthily of saints

Think of that! Paul expected the believers at Rome who lived separate from the world and its ways in dedication to God to have the same high estimate of Phebe upon her arrival. Amazing!

The word *becometh* is actually *worthily*. This same word is used in several other New Testament passages. Consider:

- 1) *Worthily* of the vocation, Eph. 4:1
- 2) *Worthily* of the Gospel, Phil. 1:22
- 3) *Worthily* of the Lord, Col. 1:10
- 4) *Worthily* of God, 1 Thess. 2:12; 3 John 6

Note: As you ponder the word *worthily* you will understand the thrust of Paul's prayer that God may "count us worthy of His calling" (2 Thess. 1:11).

b. Assisted in her business

Apparently Phebe had some personal business and Paul asked the brethren to help her. The term used is a legal one, so Phebe may have had some private legal affairs to attend. As she had helped many, they were to help her.

NOW WHAT?

Take the clue. Be a sister/brother, be a deaconess/deacon in service. Be a helper to many, even to leaders like Paul. With such a behaviour, you can expect to be received and assisted. Amen.