



The Reflector

Deaconess?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a *deaconess* of the church at Cenchreae..." (Romans 16:1, Revised Standard Version)

"I commend to you Phebe our sister, which is a *servant* of the church which is at Cenchera" (Romans 16:1, KJV).

Phoebe has become a rather popular sister lately; especially with those who see in her case justification for the *office of deaconess*.

Was Phoebe a deaconess in the same sense as the men whose qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3? Did she serve the church in the same capacity as those men? Some brethren, even among "*conservatives*", are saying so -- some rather openly.

Have we been caught up in the spirit of the age? Have we become more influenced by the Women's Movement that we might realize? I don't know. But, I do know that the reasons usually given for this advocacy will not hold water.

DEACON • DEACONESS SERVANT

The word DIAKONOS, translated *servant* (KJV) and *deaconess* (RSV), is the same word for *deacon* in 1 Tim. 3:10,13 and Phil. 1:1; but is also rendered *minister* 20 times and *servant* six times. Of the ten or so translations of Romans 16:1 that I checked in my study, they are about equally divided between

servant and *deaconess*.

The issue can not be settled by consideration of the passage alone. Even if we accept *deaconess* as a possible rendering of the word -- it does not follow that Phoebe was a *deaconess* in the very same way that those at Philippi were *deacons* (cf. Phil. 1:1). Or one would have to say that a word may have no more than one connotation in the Bible.

A word can have a *common* and a *specialized* meaning. Everywhere I go, I try to be a fair *representative* of Alabama, my native state -- but I am not a representative in the official sense of the word. I am not a member of the *House of Representatives*. Nor do I think that every time I see *representative* in the paper that it is talking about a member of Congress. *Elder* (PRESBUTEROS) and *deacon* (DIAKONOS) are such words. Elder has a common (older person) and a specialized (elders in the church) meaning. (Cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). DIAKONOS (deacon) is the same way. It may mean a deacon like those in 1 Timothy 3, or it may simply mean any servant.

DIAKONOS is used of civil rulers (Rom. 13:4), of Paul and Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), of Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), of Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6) and others. The fact that the word is translated *minister* in those cases does not change the fact that it is the same word. But it is just further proof that DIAKONOS does not always have the same meaning as it does in 1 Tim. 3 and Philippians 1.

I am nearly afraid to write the following for fear that some wild-eyed women's lib advocate

will seize upon it to try to get some *elderesses* appointed. But I am willing to take that chance in order to show the absurdity of the deaconess position.

I can come as near, if not nearer, proving that the early church had women elders as one can that it had women deacons. Yes ma'am, you read it right! 1 Timothy 5:2 speaks of "*elder women*" and tells how to treat them. The word (PRESBUTERAS) is the same as elder in Titus 1:5, except for the gender. Aged women (PRESBUTIS) are given the work of teaching the younger women in Titus 2. That ought to just about wrap it up for one looking for an excuse to appoint she-elders. I had as soon appoint she-elders on the basis of these verse as I had to appoint she-deacons on the basis of Romans 16:1.

It is suggested, by some, that women deacons are needed because there are some things that they can do better than men. I can make the same argument for women elders. They can teach younger women and deal with some of their problems better than men. The women might feel more like talking with a woman about their spiritual problems than they would a man. A woman can come as near meeting the qualifications of an elder as one can meeting those of a deacon. If you want to insist that Phoebe was a deaconess, then I will insist that those in 1 Tim. 5:2 were elderesses. Who'll be the first now to come out in favor of she-elders among my brethren? Not me. I haven't overcome my inhibitions against appointing deaconesses yet.

Continued Next Page →

ENROLLED WIDOWS

Some assume that those widows in 1 Timothy 5:9, who were "taken into the number" (enrolled, enlisted or put on the list) were deaconesses. That is exactly what they have done -- assumed it. There is nothing in the word, KATALEGO ("taken into the number" or "enrolled"), to warrant such a conclusion. They are not called deaconesses. The context does not hint that they were such. It talks about relieving widows, not appointing deaconesses (widows or otherwise). While we agree that there may be more than one class of widows considered -- widows that are to be honored, being widows indeed, and those enrolled as charges of the church -- we cannot find one word suggesting that they were to be appointed and serve as deaconesses. We doubt that anyone else would get that idea without having already assumed that Phoebe was a deaconess.

DEACONS' WIVES? OR DEACONESSSES?

Since the word for wives in 1 Timothy 3:11 is often used of women in general; some have thought that these women mentioned in connection with deacons were really deaconesses. Again, we doubt that anyone would get this idea without having first assumed that there were deaconesses in the early church of which Phoebe was one. Albert Barnes, who thought Phoebe was a deaconess in the official sense, does a good job of refuting the idea that these women were deaconesses:

"But that the common interpretation, which makes it refer to wives of deacons, as such, is to be adhered to, seems to be clear. For, (1) It is the obvious and natural interpretation. (2) The word here used - wives - is never used of itself to denote deaconesses. (3) If the apostle had meant deaconesses it would have been easy to express it without ambiguity; comp. Notes, Rom. xvi.1. (4) What is here mentioned is im-

portant, whether the same thing is mentioned of bishops or not. (5) In the qualifications of bishops, the apostle had made a statement respecting his family, which made any specification about particular members of the family unnecessary. He was to be one who presided in a proper manner over his own house, or who had a well-regulated family, ver. 4,5..." (Notes on the New Testament, Thess. - Phil., p. 149).

Certainly, I would not take Barnes as authority, but it is interesting to note that he rejects the idea of these women being deaconesses even having thought that Phoebe was one. Of course, I think he missed the point of Phoebe for reasons given earlier. Given all the Bible says about a woman's relationship to man and to God, how can one assume that Phoebe and others were deaconesses in the same sense the men of 1 Timothy 3 were -- especially considering all the assumptions that have to be made to make them so? It is a mystery to me.

— from THE REFLECTOR Dec. 1978 □

The Deeper Issues Of Our Struggle

Luther Blackmon

Brother N. B. Hardeman told a story about a man who received a telegram which read as follows: "Your Uncle James, being advanced in years, an being debilitated both physically and intellectually by reason of the frailties that attach to encroachment of senility, and having suffered severe financial reverses, in a moment of temporary dementia precipitated his own demise." Not being familiar with the terminology of the message he took it to a neighbor for translation. "Well," said the neighbor after reading it over, "it just says that your Uncle Jim got old, lost his wad, went nuts

and bumped hisself off."

Some time ago I read in a bulletin the following: "Nurtured in a piety in which God is lavished with our saccharine love and a theology in which membership in the right religious institution becomes the key to salvation, our morality, gutted by a process of spiritualization which psychologizes and disembodies all our social responsibilities, and the legal systematization which catalogues an impersonal list of touch-me-nots, we modern christians are unable to recognize the towering presence of unbelief, especially in ourselves."

When you strip the excess fat from this logomachy its sounds like the brother is trying to tell us that our religion is anemic and our love for God hypocritical because our faith has been stunted by such scriptural handicaps as the contention that *salvation is only in Christ*, hence in the one body which is His church (2 Tim. 2:10; Eph. 1:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:19-24; Eph. 4:4, etc.); that the work of the church is primarily spiritual and not social, designed to prepare people for heaven rather than trying to solve the world's social ills, and by placing upon us certain restrictions -- certain "don'ts."

In the same article the writer tells us that the people who emphasize the need and necessity of immersion and oppose instrumental music in worship are fools. I don't get excited every time I am called a fool. I learned some time back that there are different kinds of fools. I don't even mind very much making some enemies if I make them by contending for what I believe to be the truth. When Senator Vilas nominated Grover Cleveland for a second term he said, among other things, "We love him for the enemies has made." Neither am I greatly disturbed if my "love" is not the quality and measure that this "Church of Christ" preacher thinks it ought

"THE FIRST 16 DIDN'T WORK OUT"

The January 1, 1989 edition of The Birmingham News, carried a story and a picture of a 46 year old Woodlawn man who has just married for the 17th time. Other local media also reported on the story. You see, "The first 16 didn't work out." He claimed to have legally divorced each before marrying another, though the reporter was not able to find all the divorce records. He did find 16 of the marriage records by checking two local county seats.

The story said, "Despite his lengthy marital history, _____ said he believes divorce is bad. He said that friends do not understand how he can get divorced and still say he believes in God."

I understand that this is not a record. I read somewhere that the record is 27. At age 46, breaking the record should be no problem if he maintains his pace. However, the man says that he is not out to break any records.

Now, I have been thinking about this fellow's condition in the light of what I am hearing from some brethren lately. If Matthew 19:9 applies only to those in the kingdom of God, then what about this fellow? Though he says he believes in God, he is not yet in the kingdom. So, he has not violated Matthew 19:9 since it does not apply to him. If he sinned, then what law has he broken since Jesus's marriage law does not apply to him?

Since he already believes in God and even thinks divorce is bad, maybe one of these fellows can go out and teach him more perfectly and baptize him and make number 17 his wife of record in the kingdom — or maybe number 18 if, as it often does, it takes several sessions to convert him.

Stay tuned.

to be. I have noticed for several years now that my preaching brethren hardly ever reach the intellectual pinnacle and develop the capacity for love indicated by this brother until they have attended a denominational school of religion and outgrown the Bible. "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). I'll settle for this if I can make it.

Our learned brother continues (and this brings to mind some questions): "The deeper issues of our struggle are . . . clarifying the alternatives between faith and unfaith . . . and developing an honest and articulate faith which is willing to risk itself in combat with worldly-wise and intelligent exponents of unfaith."

I don't think I know this fellow personally, but anyone who has been keeping up with the trends in this brotherhood will, like Isaac of old, recognize his voice. I could not help wondering when I read this, just what kind of ammunition this preacher would use if he should encounter one of these "worldly-wise and intelligent exponents of

unfaith." Surely, he would not try to use the Bible. That would invite certain defeat because he either doesn't know much about that book or he doesn't believe enough of it. An intelligent infidel would make him look like Lil' Abner at a scientists' convention.

In any contest there must be a norm, some standard. Otherwise, there could be neither winner nor loser. If there are such things as right and wrong, truth and error, then there is a standard by which these things are determined. Otherwise, we have only a war of words. What is our standard of authority? With what shall we meet the "exponents of unfaith"?

Is revelation subjective? Then there are as many standards as there are individuals. Is the Bible the standard? Whose Bible? Karl Barth's? Emil Brunner's? With a bible that has been "gutted" by the compromise of timid souls and by those who have been captivated by the "wisdom of the world"?

I must confess that all I know about my duty to my Creator came from the Bible. All I know

about the Bible is found in the words of the Bible. Words in the Bible mean just what they mean anywhere else. A combination of words make a sentence. Sentences convey thoughts. A sentence in the Bible conveys the same thought now that it conveyed when it was written. If God had *anything* to do with writing the Bible, He had *everything* to do with it. If God meant to convey any message through the words of the Bible, that message is still there and means just what it meant 1900 years ago. Twentieth century science, vanity and deification of human wisdom have not changed that. The word *baptize* meant immerse when the New Testament was written and it still means that. Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:34,35 teach now just what they taught 1900 years ago, namely, that Jesus was miraculously conceived and born of a virgin. First Corinthians 15 and other scriptures teach that he was raised from dead. Hebrews 9 teaches that his blood made atonement for our sins. Men with confidence in these things will not cringe in the presence of "towering unbelief." If the Bible is the word of God then man must obey, and he can find out what it teaches only by finding out what it says. If some of the Bible can be ignored or rewritten with impunity, then why not all of it?

(EDITOR' NOTE: Brother Blackmon has been gone to his reward for sometime now, but his influence lives on through such writings as the above article. I don't know just where it first appeared nor did I make note as to source from which I lifted it. It is still a timely article and worthy of our consideration.) □

WE ARE LITTLE LATE, FOLKS.

We are sorry that this issue is coming to you a little late. A two week bout with a sinus infection and flu bug kind of put us behind.

THE EMBARRASSED ATHEIST

A certain atheist lecturer was parading up and down the countryside, pouring out his verblage against the very thought of God, and heaping ridicule upon all those foolish enough to believe in God, and in the Bible as the word of God.

On one occasion, he addressed a group gathered in a large hall. His wordy eloquence stirred them to a high pitch and deeming himself master of the situation, he hurled a challenge to Almighty God. If there be a God, he challenged Him to reveal Himself by smiting the lecturer to death. When God did not do this, the man turned to his audience and exclaimed: "See, there is no God!"

Whereupon a little woman, with a shawl about her head, arose to her feet. She addressed her remarks directly to the lecturer, as follows: "Sir, I cannot answer your arguments; your learning is beyond me. With your superior intelligence, will you answer me one question?"

"I have been a believer in Christ for many years, I have rejoiced in His salvation, and I have enjoyed my Bible. His comfort has been a tremendous joy. If, when I die, I come to learn that there is no God, that Jesus is not the Son of God, that the Bible is not true, and that there

OUR NEXT MEETING

MAY 7-12, 1989

H. E. PHILLIPS

is no salvation or heaven, pray, sir, what have I lost, believing in Christ during this life?"

The room was very still. The audience quickly grasped the logic of the woman's question. Then they turned to the atheist, who was swayed by the woman's simplicity.

In quiet tones he made an answer; "Madam, you won't stand to lose a thing." Hearing this, the woman spoke again: "You have been kind to have answered my question. Permit me to ask another. If, when it comes time for you to die, you discover that the Bible is true, that there is a God, that Jesus is His Son, that there is a heaven and a hell -- pray, sir, what will YOU stand to lose?"

The atheist had no answer. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psalm 14:1).
— Via Centerview Tidings, Russellville, AL.

THE MAN WITH A CONSECRATED CAR

He couldn't speak before a crowd;
He couldn't teach a class;
But when he came to Sunday school
He brought the folks "en masse."
He couldn't sing to save his life,
In public couldn't pray,
But always his "jalopy"
Was crammed on each Lord's Day.

Although he could not sing,
Nor teach, nor lead in prayer,
He listened well and had a smile
And he was always there
With all the others whom he brought,
Who lived both near and far,
And God's work prospered -- for he had
A consecrated car.

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SERVICES

Sundays:

Bible Classes	9:45 A.M.
Worship	10:45 A.M.
Worship	6:00 P.M.

Wednesdays:

Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Bible Classes	7:30 P.M.

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