

“Phoebe, Deacon of the Church of Cenchreae and Leader of Many”

Philip B. Payne ©2024 Payne Loving Trust. All rights reserved.

CBE Friday July 26, 2024 7:30–8:30 PM DoubleTree Ballroom 35 min. *= slide

* Romans 16 greets more people than any other passage in Paul’s letters. Paul identifies by name 10 people as his coworkers in the gospel. In light of the common Hellenistic belief that women are inferior to men and should be silent in public assemblies, it’s remarkable that 7 of these 10 coworkers in gospel ministry are women:

Verses 1–2: **Phoebe**, “deacon of the church of Cenchreae ... who has been a leader of many, including me,”

Verses 3–5: **Prisca** and her husband Aquila, “my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the gentiles give thanks.” Note that as both Luke and Paul do in every passage about their ministry, Paul names Prisca before her husband, contrary to Greek custom, and uses the respectful form of her name, “Prisca,” rather than the diminutive “Priscilla.”

Verse 6: **Mary** “who has worked very hard among you”

* Verse 7: Andronicus and **Junia** “outstanding among the apostles.” Eldon Epp demonstrated that the unanimous credible testimony of the church’s first millennium identifies Junia as a woman. He notes that all church fathers who comment on this refer to them as “outstanding among the apostles” Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 35, 69.

Verse 8: Urbanus, “our coworker in Christ,”

12: **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**, “co-workers in the Lord,”

And the beloved **Persis**, “who has worked hard in the Lord.”

* The first person Paul commends here is Phoebe:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who holds [οὔσαν] the office of deacon [διάκονον] of the church in Cenchreae.¹ Welcome her in the Lord as worthy of God's holy people, and help her in whatever matter she may need your help, for she herself has been a leader of many, including me.

This talk will highlight seven things Paul affirms about Phoebe in the order they occur here.

* **First** is that Paul tells the Romans, “I commend to you Phoebe” and “Welcome her.” “Welcome her,” contrasts with all the other people to whom Paul conveys “greetings.” Paul’s explicit commendation of Phoebe and call to “welcome her” indicates that Paul sent Phoebe to them and chose Phoebe to deliver this letter to the church in Rome. Romans is Paul’s most theologically comprehensive letter. Paul trusted her to deliver this precious and highly significant letter. This shows that Paul held her in the highest trust. Paul’s commendation in effect identifies Phoebe as Paul’s trusted representative. Paul’s following statements regarding her emphasize how much he trusts her. As Paul’s trusted representative, she is the obvious person the Romans would have asked regarding any questions they had about the letter she delivered. Therefore, just as Mary’s Magnificat was the first Christian exposition of Scripture, Phoebe was the first interpreter of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

¹ Cenchrea is Corinth’s eastern harbor city on the Saronic Gulf. Cf. Strabo, 8.6.22; Philo, *Flacc.* 155. καί in \mathfrak{P}^{46} A² B C* 81 pc bo sy Ambst emphasizes that Phoebe is “also” a deacon, reinforcing her credentials, cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:781.

* The **second** thing to note is that Paul calls Phoebe, “our sister.” “Our sister” highlights the nature of Christian fellowship as a family that cares for each other and treats each other with respect. Paul had emphasized familial love within the body of Christ throughout Romans 12–15. Paul describes Phoebe using familial language, not patron-client language. The Christian family transcends geography. It does not matter that Phoebe, which means “shining, beaming, bright,” was named after one of the Titan goddesses,² she is a sister in Christ. (Fitzmyer) Phoebe was a common Greco-Roman name.” Unlike Onesimus, which means “useful” and was a common name for a slave, Phoebe is a name that is not typical of slaves. Nor would one expect a former slave to have the wealth and social status Paul’s statements about Phoebe imply.

* The **third** thing to note is that Paul reinforces her credentials by writing, “who is also³ deacon of the church in Cenchreae,” which was Corinth’s eastern harbor city on the Saronic Gulf.⁴ “Who is” is a present participle of the verb “to be.” It specifies that Phoebe is a deacon, οὐσταν. Similarly, present participles of this same verb also specify an office in: John 11:49 “Caiaphas, being high priest,” Acts 18:12 “Gallio, being proconsul of Achaia,” and Acts 24:10, Felix “being judge”.

* Origen’s commentary on Romans 16:1 confirms this, “This text teaches with the authority of the Apostle that even women are instituted deacons in the

² Gregory R. Perry, “Phoebe of Cenchreae and “Women” of Ephesus: “Deacons” in the Earliest Churches” *Presbyterion* 36/1 (Spring 2020): 9–36 at 13.

³ $\text{K}\alpha\iota$ in \mathfrak{P}^{46} A² B C* 81 pc bo sy Ambst emphasizes that Phoebe is “also” a deacon, reinforcing her credentials, cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:781.

⁴ Strabo, 8.6.22; Philo, *Flacc.* 155.

Church. This was the function which was exercised in the church of Cenchreae by Phoebe, who was the object of high praise and recommendation by Paul.”⁵

* Cranfield’s highly respected commentary notes, “Who is” makes it “very much more natural . . . to understand it as referring to a definite office.”⁶ The qualifier, “of the church in Cenchreae,” specifies an office in the church in Cenchreae. Similarly, “elders of the church [in Ephesus]” in Acts 20:17 refers to people holding the church office of elder. In both cases the name of the church office is in the accusative and the identical words “of the church” are genitive. Paul uses the clearest way to convey that Phoebe held the office of deacon: “who is deacon of the church in Cenchreae.”

* The **fourth** thing to note is that the Greek word Paul chose to identify her office is “deacon,” *diakonos*. This is the same word Paul later used in Philippians 1:1 to address their “overseers and deacons.” It’s also in the list of qualifications for overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8 and 12. Many church fathers affirm that 1 Tim 3:11 identifies the qualifications for women deacons, including Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), *Stromata* 1158; John Chrysostom (AD 347–407), *Homily 11 on First Timothy 3:11*⁷; Epiphanius (AD 310–403);⁸ Theodoret of

⁵ Thomas Hopko, *Women and the Priesthood* (Yonkers: SVS, 1999), 95.

⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979). Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 886–87, ““διάκονος together with οἷσα points more to a recognized ministry or position of responsibility with the congregation.”

⁷ Philip Schaff, ed. and trans., *Homilies on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. (NPNF¹; New York: Scribner, 1914) 13:441.

⁸ Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94.

Cyrus (AD 393–458),⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350–428);¹⁰ and Pelagius (AD 354–418).¹¹ The linking of “deacons” with “overseers” clearly refers to offices in the church.

* Each of the other three occurrences of “deacon” *διάκονος* in Romans (13:4 twice; 15:8) refers to a leader and in context is better translated “minister” than “servant.” In fact, William Tyndale’s translation states that Phoebe “is a minister of the congregacion [*sic*] of Chenchrea [*sic*].” If Paul had intended merely a regular pattern of service, a verbal form such as “who serves” nine verses earlier (15:25) or the more general “ministry” (*διακονία*, as in 1 Corinthians 16:15) would have been more appropriate than the noun *διάκονος*.¹²

Some scholars argue based on later church office titles that Phoebe was one of many deacons and that deacons had less authority than overseers in Cenchreae. But Romans was written years before any reference to “overseers” (*episkopos*) in any surviving Christian literature. The only reference to “overseers” *episkopos* in Acts is used as equivalent to “elders” (*presbyteroi* 20:17) regarding an event long after Paul wrote Romans. We see this same lack of differentiation between “overseer” and “elder” in the much later Pastoral Epistles. The qualifications for “overseers” in 1 Timothy closely parallel those for “elders” in

⁹ Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek. *Ordained Women in the Early Church, A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2005), 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20–21

¹² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), 886. LSJ (398) lists it as a masculine noun, “*διάκονος, ὁ,*” that can be used of women, in which case it can be feminine, e.g., *CIG* (3037), “fem. *deaconess, Ep. Rom.* 16.1.” Patristic literature uses the feminine form, “*διάκονος, ἡ,*” for “teacher and evangelist among women ... intermediary between lay women and deacon or bishop, compared with [the Holy] Ghost in relation to Christ and believers, *Const. App.* 2.26.6” (*PGL* 1:353); G. H. R. Horsley, ed., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1977/79* (Macquarie University, N.S.W., Australia: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1982/87), 2.193–95; 4:239–41.

Titus. Furthermore, Titus 1:5 and 7 use “elder” and “overseer” as equivalent: “Appoint **elders** who are blameless, ... for an **overseer**, as God’s steward, must be blameless ...” So, even in these later references to more developed church leadership titles, there is still no distinction between overseers or bishops and elders. Remember, too, that Cenchreae was the port of Corinth separated from the main city. At that time it was probably a small church, so we should not assume that it had more than one deacon or that it distinguished “deacon” from the title “overseer” that is only attested later. Therefore, C. E. B. Cranfield was justified to write that it is “virtually certain that Phoebe is being described as ‘a (or possibly “the”) deacon’ of the church in question, and that this occurrence of *διάκονος* is to be classified with its occurrences in Philippians 1.1 and 1 Timothy 3.8 and 12.”¹³ Herman Ridderbos concludes that Paul’s letters give no justification “that it was only the non-official *charisma* that was extended to the woman and not regular office.”¹⁴

* Even later, when deacons were distinguished from overseers, it’s clear that deacons were not just “servants” of the churches. 1 Timothy 3:13 affirms, “For those who have served well as deacons gain good standing for themselves, and more boldness in their faith in Christ Jesus.” “Boldness” implies vocal participation, as the standard New Testament Greek dictionary explains: “1 **a use of speech that conceals nothing and passes over nothing, *outspokenness, frankness, plainness* ... 2 *openness to the public*, before whom speaking and actions take place ... 3 **a state of boldness and confidence, *courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness*.**” This indicates that “deacons” were involved in church ministries similar to what we today call “ministers.” Paul repeatedly identifies deacons as “fellow-slaves” or “a slave in the Lord” (Col 1:7; 4:7), including**

¹³ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:781.

¹⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 461.

Timothy (1 Tim 4:6; Phil 1:1) to whom Paul wrote in 2 Tim 2:24–25, “the Lord’s slave must be “skillful in teaching ... instructing opponents with gentleness.” “Skillful in teaching,” διδακτικόν, is identical to this qualification for overseers in 1 Tim 3:2.

* Some Bible versions, not wanting to imply that a woman could have an office of church leadership, translate this word “servant.” It’s true that in some contexts *diakonos* can be translated “servant.” It should be obvious, however, from the following complete list of passages in Paul’s letters where the RSV translates *diakonos* “servant” that every one of these passages refer to leaders with authority:

Romans 13:1, 4: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities ... for he is God’s servant (*diakonos*) for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant (*diakonos*) of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.”

Romans 15:8–9: “Christ became a servant (*diakonos*) to the circumcised”

1 Corinthians 3:5 “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants (*diakonoi*) through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.”

2 Corinthians 6:4 “as servants (*diakonoi*) of God, we [Paul and Timothy] commend ourselves in every way.”

2 Corinthians 11:13–15, 23 writes that “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” are actually “servants (*diakonoi*) of” Satan who “disguise themselves as servants (*diakonoi*) of righteousness.... Are they **servants** (*diakonoi*) of Christ? I [Paul] am a better one.”

* Furthermore, churches then didn’t have “servants,” and since this identifies Phoebe’s position in the church in Cenchreae, “deacon” is correct, or, to convey the meaning with its closest English equivalent, “minister.” The RSV

translates *diakonos* in each of the remaining occurrences in the New Testament “minister”:

2 Corinthians 3:6 “[God] has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant.”

Ephesians 3:7 “Of this gospel I [Paul] was made a minister.”

Ephesians 6:21 “Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord”

Colossians 1:7 “Epaphras our beloved fellow servant (*sundoulos*). He is a faithful minister (*diakonos*) of Christ.”

* Colossians 1:23 “the gospel ... of which I, Paul, became a minister (*diakonos*).”

Colossians 1:25 “I became a minister (*diakonos*) according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known”

Colossians 4:7 “Tychichus ... is a ... faithful minister (*diakonos*) and fellow servant (*sundoulos*) in the Lord.”

1 Timothy 4:6 “If you [Timothy] put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister (*diakonos*) of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed.”

In addition, many manuscripts of 1 Thessalonians 3:2 identify “Timothy, our brother and minister (*diakonos* & A P Ψ 0278. 6.81. 629*. 1241. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc lat co; Bas) of God”

The translation “deaconess” for *diakonos* is misleading because both ancient inscriptions, e.g., *IG* 3:3527, cf. LSJ (398), and patristic literature use a different word for “deaconess,” *διακόνισσα*, that apparently conveyed less authority than “deacon.”¹⁵ The standard Patristic Greek Lexicon (*PGL* 1:352)

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), 886. G. H. R. Horsley, ed., *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri*

identifies *διακόνισσα* as having a status that is inferior to women elders, *presbytis*.

Furthermore, in many churches today, a “deaconess” has less authority than a “deacon.”

The standard New Testament Greek dictionary, called BDAG 231, lists many examples showing that *diakonos* can take either a masculine or a feminine article (Marcus Diakonus, Vi. Porphyry p. 81, 6; MAI 14, 1889, p. 210; Pel.-Leg. 11,18; many documentary reff. in New Docs 4, 239f). It cites an inscription referring to a woman named *diakonos Tukē* (CIG II 3037).

* The *Patristic Greek Lexicon PGL* 1:353 cites many more cases where the title *diakonos* has a feminine article “the deacon” (διάκονος, ἡ) identifying women deacons.”¹⁶ It identifies deacon as “a regular minister of [the] Church” (M.47.5 twice). Saint Basil (of Caesarea ob. 379) *epistle* 199 *can.*44 (3.296B; M.32.729B) identifies a woman deacon as “a consecrated person.” The Council of Chalcedon 15 says that women deacons are to be “ordained with imposition of hands,” that “careful testing [is] required,” and that the minimum age for [their] ordination [is] 40.” *Const. App.* 2.26.6 identifies a woman deacon as a “teacher and evangelist among women ... [an] intermediary between lay women and [a] deacon or [a] bishop. [Such women deacons are] compared with [the Holy] Ghost in relation to Christ and believers.”

Published in 1977/79 (Macquarie University, N.S.W., Australia: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1982/87), 2.193–95; 4:239–41.

¹⁶*IG* 12.3.1238; *MAMA* 1.194; 1.226; 1.326; 3.744 (sace. V-vi) that Palladius Monachus (of Ante 431) v. *Chrys.*10 (p.61.3; M.47.35) and v. *Chrys.*16 (p.107.3; M.47.60= *in dialogues de vita Joannis Chrysostomi*. All these examples show that Warren C. Trenchard is correct to include “deacon” in his list of nineteen Greek words that can be either masculine or feminine [*Complete Vocabulary Guide to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992, 1998), 296–97]. LSJ (398), lists it as a masculine noun, “διάκονος, ὁ,” that can be used of women, in which case it can be feminine, e.g., *CIG* 3037, “fem. deaconess, *Ep. Rom.* 16.1.”

* The **fifth** thing to note is that Paul tells the church in Rome, “give her support in whatever matter¹⁷ she may have need from you.” “Matter” covers all kinds of business and legal affairs. For Paul to tell the church in Rome to “give her support in whatever matter she may have need from you” shows that Paul implicitly trusts Phoebe regarding whatever matter she may have need.

* The **sixth** thing to note is that Paul identifies Phoebe as a “leader of many.” Versions such as the NASB, RSV, and old NIV, that translate with the same word “help her ... for she has been a helper,” hide the fact that the Greek verb translated as “help” (παραστῆτε from παρίστημι, “to help”) means almost the opposite of προστάτις. “Help” combines “stand” and “alongside”(para). προστάτις combines “stand” and “in rank before” (pro).¹⁸ If Paul had intended to say simply that Phoebe had “helped” others, it would have been natural for him either to repeat the verb “help” or to write παραστάτις to make his reason parallel his request. And in fact, two “Western” manuscripts, F and G, do substitute παραστάτις for προστάτις. This fits the “anti-feminist” tendency of the “Western” text revisions. The translation “helper” is not accurate. It would almost certainly insult a προστάτις.

* The 2011 NIV revision and the NRSV’s “for she has been a *benefactor* of many and of myself as well” is doubtful. Neither the standard classical Greek dictionary nor Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich list *benefactor* as a possible meaning of προστάτις. Virtually all Greek dictionaries identify “benefactor” as the meaning of a different word, εὐεργέτης (*euergetēs*), meaning “one who does good,” as

¹⁷ E.g., 1 Thess 4:6; cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (trans. S. J. Hafemann; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 246.

¹⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 223, writes as though he is oblivious to this, “Paul is probably making a play on words ... ‘help (*paristēmi*) her ... for she has been a helper (*prostatis*).”

Paul's companion Luke does (Luke 22:25). No other word in the New Testament related to προστάτις means *benefactor*.¹⁹ There are many ways that Paul could have clearly identified Phoebe was a benefactor, such as εὐεργέτης, but προστάτις is not one of them. Furthermore, if Paul had intended to convey her ongoing generosity, we would expect the present tense rather than the aorist tense “she has been a προστάτις” since the aorist refers to something in the past. People who prefer “benefactor” because it avoids implying that Phoebe had authority should note that Luke identifies “those in authority over them” as “benefactors.” Secular usage indicates that benefactors preferred the designation εὐεργέτης rather than to be called “leaders” (προστάτης) because εὐεργέτης highlights generosity rather than power.

* The standard Classical Greek dictionary LSJ 1526 defines προστάτις as the feminine form of προστάτης, “one who stands before, front-rank man,” “leader, chief,” “ruler,” “administrator, president or presiding officer,” “one who stands before and protects, guardian, champion,” “patron who took charge of the interests of μέτοικοι [aliens].” This list includes all except specialized meanings of προστάτις like “prostate gland.” As C. K. Barrett has argued,²⁰ the meaning *patron* would not apply to Phoebe since Paul “was born a Roman citizen” Acts 22:25–28. Furthermore, if Phoebe had been Paul's patron, that would obligate Paul as her client to do her bidding. This would contradict Paul's emphasis on his sole allegiance to God.

* Later, as ecclesiastical authority structures developed, Justin Martyr, who died AD 165, uses προστάτης to identify “ecclesiastical rulers” (*dialogus cum*

¹⁹ I critique below BDAG's (885 definition without support: “a woman in a supporting role, *patron, benefactor*.”

²⁰ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (HNTC; New York/Evanston/London: Harper & Row, 1957), 283.

Tryphone Judaeo 92.2 (PG 6.696A). Cyril Hierosolymitanus, who died AD 386, *catecheses illuminandorum* 4.35, uses *προστάτης* to identify “the apostles and the ruling bishops.” St. Basil Caesariensis Cappadociae, who died AD 379 *ep.* 214.4 (3.323A; PG 32.789C), and Gregory of Nyssa, who died AD 394, *de vita Macrinae* (p. 385.17; PG 46.973B) use *προστάτης* for “bishop.”

Paul, in calling Phoebe a *προστάτις*, emphasizes the respect she should be given. This is the feminine form of the word for the “president” of a society, including synagogues. Every other New Testament word that combines these two words, “in rank before” and “stand,” and has a meaning that fits Romans 16:2, is about leaders. For example, with those words in bold print:

- If it [one’s gift] is **leadership** . . . govern diligently. (Romans 12:8 NIV 1973)
- Respect those . . . **who are over you** in the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 5:12 RSV)
- The elders **who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honor. (1 Timothy 5:17)
- How can anyone who does not know how to **manage** their own household nurture the church of God? (1 Timothy 3:5)

* An examination of the use of *προστάτις* in Greek literature shows that it is almost invariably used of someone with a “superior rank, whether a ruler, magistrate, or goddess of Greek mythology.”²¹ The following twelve passages exemplify the almost invariable use of *προστάτις* to identify rulers:

1. The first century BC grammarian, Philoxenus, *Fragmenta*²² 1602.001 describes “the goddess Enyo. She is supreme (*προστάτις*) in war.” Confirming

²¹ Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 11.

²² C. Theodoridis, *Die Fragmente des Grammatikers Philoxenos* (Sammlung griechischer und lateinischer Grammatiker 2; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976), 93–387. Accessed at

this meaning, Pausanias (AD 110–180), *The Descriptions of Greece: Messenia* 4.30.5, wrote that Homer “represented Athena and Enyo as supreme (ἡγεμονίαν) in war.”²³

2. An early first century inscription on the base of a black granite statue now in the Alexandria Greco-Roman Museum²⁴ states: “The high-priestess and president (προστάτις) Tetiris dedicated this to the Apollonian (?) women’s synod (synodos) in the ...xth year of Caesar, on the first of the month Pachon.”²⁵

3. Origen, who lived from AD 185–253, wrote that “even masses of believers have read” Sextus.²⁶ Sextus states in *Sentiae Sexti* 502–504: “A husband and wife [should be] mutually living in perfect union as one. The husband should honor his wife as leader (προστάτιν, προστατίς), just as the woman should honor her husband as leader (κηδεμόνα, κηδεμών). There should be no possession which is the husband’s which is not also the wife’s.”²⁷ Sextus affirms the inseparable equality of husband and wife in both privilege and honor.

<http://sephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?1602:001:108847>. Translation by Seth M. Knorr, *A Biblical Case for Women Pastors, Elders, and Deacons* (2nd ed.; Shippensburg, PA: Eleutheros, 2024), 7.

²³ W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod, trans., *Pausanias, Description of Greece, Volumes 3–5* (Laconia, Messenia, Elis 1) (LCL 188; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 338–39.

²⁴ Bahnassa (inv. 211, Catalogue 170) AGRW 282 = GRA III 180 = IAlexandriaK 70 = PHI 227160 = AGRW ID# 652, Copenhagen Inventory info: 1343.

²⁵ <http://www.philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/?p=652> accessed 7/20/2024.

Translation by John S. Kloppenborg of [τῆ Ἀπολλ(?)ωνιακῆ γυναικῆ | [συνόδῳ] ἐκ κοινῶν χρη|[μάτων . . .]ριν ἀρχιμέρηα (vac.) | [καὶ προσ]τάτις καὶ Τετίρις || [ἔτους . . .] Κ[αί]σαρος Παχῶν α'. Designated: AGRW 282 = GRA III 180 = IAlexandriaK 70 = PHI 227160 = AGRW ID# 652.

²⁶ Walter T. Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 1.

²⁷ Henry Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus. Texts and Studies, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*. (TS NS 5; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 66. Accessed 7/19/2024 at <https://gnosis.study/library/Гнозис/Исследования/ENG/Chadwick%20H.%20-%20The%20Sentences%20of%20Sextus.pdf>. Translation by Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 9.

* 4. Plutarch (*Moralia* fragment 67) writes of Zeus “effecting the growth of the seed by his rains ... presiding over (προστάτιν, προστάτις) the fruitful powers (δυνάμεσων, δύναμις) of the earth.”²⁸

* 5. Atticus, a second century philosopher, states, “Plato demonstrated [the soul] to be the power (προστάτις) presiding over all things”²⁹ (fragment 9.7).

6. Eusebius also quotes this.³⁰ “The προστάτις presiding over all things” identifies προστάτις as the highest power, the seat of final authority.³¹

7. Porphyry’s *Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey* (*De antro nymphoum* 12.10) in section 6 refers, “To the nymphs likewise, who preside over (προστάτισιν, προστάτις) waters, a cavern, in which there are perpetually flowing streams, Let, therefore, this present cavern be consecrated to souls, and among the more partial powers (δυνάμεσι, *dunamis*), to nymphs that preside over streams and fountains.”³² Here, again προστάτις refers to one who presides over and includes power. The identical idea also occurs earlier (*De antro nymphoum* 8.6) and later (*De antro nymphoum* 12.14) in this work using the verb “preside over,” “For we peculiarly call the Naiades, and the powers (*dunamis*) that preside

²⁸ Francis H. Sandbach, *Fragments in Plutarch’s Moralia in Sixteen Volumes* (LCL vol. 15; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 162–63.

²⁹ J. Baudry, Atticos. *Fragments de son oeuvre* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1931): 1-33, fragment 9.7.

³⁰ Edwin H. Gifford, trans., *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis Libri XV Tomus III. Pars Prior* (Oxonii: E Typographeo Academico, 1903), 15.9c–d.

³¹ In a closely parallel passage shortly before this in *Praeparatio evangelica* 15.9, Eusebius refers to those who, unlike Aristotle “assigned to the soul a certain power.” Here Eusebius appears to have used *dunamis* (“power”) as a synonym for προστάτις.

³² Translation cited from

https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_cave_of_nymphs_02_translation.htm, accessed 4/10/2024. Thomas Taylor, trans., *Porphyry, On the Cave of the Nymphs in the Thirteenth Book of the Odyssey* (London: John M. Watkins, 1917), 18 (section 6 in Taylor).

over (προεστῶσας, *proistēmi*) the waters, Nymphs.”³³ This confirms that *προστάτις* and *προΐστημι* (*proistēmi*) can convey the same meaning, “to preside.”³⁴

8. A Greek Magic Papyrus (*Papyri Graecae Magicae*, PGM 36.338) calls the goddess Myrrha, the mother of Anubis, “the overseer (*προστάτις*) of Anubis and the guide of Isis.”

* 9. Aelius Aristides (AD 117–181) *Against Leptines* writes, “Thus, she is the mightiest over everyone and victorious in everything ... She is the guardian and sovereign (*προστάτις*) among every human being” (LIV.52).³⁵

10. The post-second century Pseudo-Lucianus, *Charidemus* 10.4–6 wrote, “each goddess is a patroness of [better translated ‘sovereign over’; *προστάτις*] one particular thing and never quarrels with another over her sphere of power.”³⁶

11. Proclus Lycius (AD 412–485), *Commentary on the Republic of Plato*, Essay 6, Book 1, K106.2–3 refers to “The goddess who oversees (*προστάτις*) justice.”³⁷

³³ Translation cited from

https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_cave_of_nymphs_02_translation.htm, accessed 4/10/2024. Thomas Taylor, trans., *Porphyry, On the Cave of the Nymphs in the Thirteenth Book of the Odyssey* (London: John M. Watkins, 1917), 15 (section 4 in Taylor).

³⁴ Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 220–223. Grudem asserts that “leader” “is found in no English translation,” The CEV, however, has “a respected leader for many others, including me.”

³⁵ William Dindorf, ed., *Aristides ex Recensione* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Reimer, 1829), 2:670–71. Vol. 2 includes *Πρὸς Λεπτίνην Ὑπὲρ Ἀτελείας* (*Against Leptines*). Translation by Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 8.

³⁶ M. D. Macleod, trans., *Lucian in Eight Volumes* (Vol. 8 ed. by T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, L. A. Post, and E. H. Warmington (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 8:480–81. Pseudo-Lucian, *Charidemus* is in vol. 8.

³⁷ Robert Lamberton, *Proclus the Successor on Poetics and the Homeric Poems: Essays 5 and 6 of His Commentary on the Republic of Plato* (WGRW 34, ed. David Konstan and Johan C. Thom, eds.; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 128–29. Accessed 7/19/2024 at <https://archive.org/details/lamberton-proclus-the-successor-on-poetics-and-the-homeric-poems-en-2012/mode/2up>.

12. An inscription to Irene of Athens, sole ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire from AD 797–802, states “this monarch’s leadership (προστάτις) was displayed [in the] honorable character [or virtue/nobility] of [her] work as a ruler (δεσπότις).”³⁸

Some uses of the word refer to a leader who protects, but this appears always to describe a leader. For example, Appian of Alexandria (AD 95–165), *Roman History, The Civil Wars* 1.1 wrote:

Even then no violence was done, but they created a magistrate for their protection (ἀρχὴν ἑαυτοῦ προστατίν, προστατίς) and called him the tribune of the plebs, to serve especially as a check upon the consuls, who were chosen by the Senate, so that the political power should not be exclusively in their hands.³⁹

Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 77 (first century AD?) wrote about Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, “The forgetful are no longer able to present a discourse, but of course when this happens, the thought is recorded by Mnemosyne the Mother of the Muses. She is the protectress (τῆς προστατίδας, προστατίς) of words and the speakers discourse is from the memory preserved by the goddess.”⁴⁰

³⁸ The Packard Humanities Institute Lanckoronski, Städte I 159,12, lines 11–12 accessed 7/19/2024 at <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/276535>. The inscription is dated AD 911–912 and is variously designated BCH 7.1883.266,9, Belleten 22.1958.43, and Grégoire 302: καὶ χεῖρ μὲν ἡ μόναρχος ἔργου προστατίς | ὡς καὶ χορηγὸς τῶν καλῶν καὶ δεσπότις. Translation by Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 8.

³⁹ Horace White, transl., *Appian: Roman History, Volume III: The Civil Wars*, Books 1–3.26 in (4 vols.; LCL 4; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913, reprinted 1964), 2–3.

⁴⁰ F. Buffière, *Héraclite. Allégories d’Homère* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1962), 1–88. Translation by Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 9.

Two inscriptions found in Ionia in Asia Minor of Priene's honorary decree for Theon include, "Athena the goddess, protector (τῇ προστάτιδι, προστάτις) of the city."⁴¹ Britannica describes Athena as:

"the city protectress, goddess of war. ... Being the favourite child of Zeus, she had great power. As a war goddess Athena could not be dominated by other goddesses ... and as a palace goddess she could not be violated. ... In Homer's *Iliad*, Athena, as a war goddess, inspires and fights alongside the Greek heroes; her aid is synonymous with military prowess. ... Athena is the divine form of the heroic, martial ideal: she personifies excellence in close combat, victory, and glory. ... Athena was customarily portrayed wearing body armour and a helmet and carrying a shield and a lance."⁴²

* The standard New Testament dictionary, known as BDAG, defines *προστάτις* as "a woman in a supportive role, patron, benefactor." Yet none of the examples BDAG cites justifies either the meaning "woman in a supportive role" or *benefactor*. The evidence BDAG cites for *patron* refers to people with oversight over others. None of them specify a patron-client relationship or a patron who is not a leader. BDAG lists various examples of the feminine noun *προστάτις* from Greek literature. They all refer to leadership or leadership that protects.

* BDAG's first example is from the stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (first century AD). Cornutus refers to Athena, the goddess of war and states: "for intelligence should be made the guard (*προστάτιν, προστάτις*) of city

⁴¹ The Packard Humanities Institute, "Priene 76" accessed 7/19/2024 at <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/252956> and "IK Priene 73" a.k.a. ArchEph (1886) 218, B, BCH 18 (1894) 16, 7, and IvPriene (1906) 119, accessed 7/19/2024 at <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/353560?&bookid=883&location=1688>. Translation by Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 10.

⁴² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Athena-Greek-mythology>, accessed 4/17/2024.

and home and the whole of life. For this reason she is called Defender of the City and, like Zeus, Guardian of the City: both are overseers (ἐπίσκοποι) of cities.”⁴³

Other references to Athena as προστάτις confirm that προστάτις here cannot possibly mean “**a woman in a supportive role, patron, [or] benefactor.**”

BDAG’s second example is from “Lucian, *Bis Accus.* 29 θεά προστάτις ἑαυτῶν,” namely Lucian of Samosata (AD 125–180), *Bis accusatus sive Tribunalia* 29. BDAG’s citation of this passage adds the word θεά meaning “goddess” even though θεά is not in Lucian’s text and even though Lucian was not talking about a goddess. The speaker symbolizes rhetoric: “He leaves me, his lawful wife, to whom he is indebted alike for wealth and reputation, leaves me to neglect, and goes off in pursuit of novelty; and that, at a time when all eyes are turned upon me, when all men write me their protectress [προστάτις]”⁴⁴ LCL. Lucian’s point is that *rhetoric* protects. Again, προστάτις here cannot possibly mean “**a woman in a supportive role, patron, [or] benefactor.**”

BDAG’s third example is from Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 42.39.1 (pages 275–77): “They declared her queen and proceeded to prosecute the war more vigorously, inasmuch as they now had as leader [προστάτις] a representative of the family of the Ptolemies.” Here as well, προστάτις cannot mean “**a woman in a supportive role, patron, [or] benefactor.**”⁴⁵

⁴³ *Greek Theology* 37.20.51. George Boys-Stones, trans., *L. Annaeus Cornutus: Greek Theology, Fragments, and Testimonia* (WGRW 42; Atlanta: SBL, 2018), 94–95. Greek text: Carl Lang, ed, *Cornuti theologiae Graecae compendium* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1881).

⁴⁴ H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata* (4 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), 3:163. *Bis accusatus* (The Double indictment). Greek text: Franciscus Fritzschi, ed., *Lucianus Samosatensis* (2 vols.; Rostochii: Ernst Kuhn, 1865), 2:37.

⁴⁵ Earnest Cary and Herbert Baldwin Foster, *Cassius Dio Cocceianus, Roman History vol. 4* (9 vols. 1914–1927; LCL 66; London: W. Heinemann/New York: Macmillan/Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 4:174, 176 Greek and 4:175, 177 English. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/cassius_dio/42*.html accessed 5/3/2024.

BDAG's "Cass. Dio 42, 39 al." indicates by "al." that there are other passages using *prostatis* in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. But in fact, this is Cassius Dio's only use of the feminine *prostatis*. Earnest Cary's Loeb Classical Library translation of every instance of the related masculine title, *prostatēs*, in Cassius Dio's *Roman History* is either "leader" (51.4.3; 51.6.1; 52.19.3; 56.41.9) or another word that conveys leadership: "governor," (38.17.5); "guardian" (41.8.1); "head" (44.48.1–2); or "commissioner" (54.8.4).

* BDAG's fourth example is from *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (PGM 36.338). It describes the goddess Myrrha, the mother of Anubis in Greek mythology: "overseer (προστάτις) of Anubis and the guide of Isis."⁴⁶ Again, *προστάτις* here cannot mean "a woman in a supportive role, *patron*, [or] *benefactor*."

BDAG next alleges in support of its translation of Romans 16:2 that Phoebe "has proved to be of great assistance to many, including myself ... The masc. *προστάτης* ... is found w. this mng. in Israelite [Schürer III, 102] as well as in polyth.... religious circles."

* But none of the references BDAG cites conveys this meaning. Schürer does state on 3:25–26 that an inscription

"Contains the names and functions of persons who contributed for the foundation of something (a building?) ... From the names which follow, including a female patroness [*προστάτης*] named Iael, with her son Iosousa, an [*ἄρχων*] ruler; Samouel, a [*πρεσβύτης*] elder and *priest*; [and] Benjamin, a [*ψαλμολόγος*] *psalmo(logos?)*; three persons described as

⁴⁶ ἡ *προστάτις* τοῦ Ἀνούβεως, ἡ καθοδηγὸς τῆς Ἴσιδος. A. Henrichs and K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1:1973; 2:1974), 1:1–62, 66–200; 2:1–208. Accessed at <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?5002:001:487942>. The translation by Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 9 is justified because "overseer" here is a natural complement to "guide."

proselutos (variously abbreviated), with the names Samouel, Ioses, and Eioseph son of Eusebios; and two persons described as *theoseb(ēs)*.⁴⁷

But just because people with these titles contributed to this foundation does not mean that any of these titles mean “benefactor.” In fact, the standard classical Greek dictionary (LSJ) does not list “benefactor” as a meaning of any of these titles, including *προστάτης*. Furthermore, Shürer had already acknowledged (3:13) that in Syria “more than one synagogue stood in the city, and there were officials with the titles *archōn* and *prostatēs*.” This implies that since *archōn* was a title of a synagogue leader, *prostatēs* was also a title of a synagogue leader, as in this case regarding Iael.

* Nor do any of the three BDAG citations of *προστάτης* from polytheistic religious circles mean “benefactor.” The first, OGI (Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae) 209, states:

Twenty-third year of Antonius Severus. Worshiper of Apollonius, the savior, priest of the guild, senator, and in this same manner, Sroupticus was a leader who protected (*προστάτου, προστατης*) the goddess and friends.⁴⁸

Assuming that “friends” refers to those inside the guild, *προστάτης* probably means “president.” If outside, then “protector” is probably a better translation.

The second is SIG 1109.1–14:

In the year that Arrius (or: Aurelius) Epaphroditos was civic leader (*archōn*), on the eighth of Elaphebolion, an assembly (*agora*) was first convened by the priest who was nominated by Aurelius Nikomachos, who had served as

⁴⁷ Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ. A New English Version. Part 1. Vol. 3* (Revised and edited by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3:102.

⁴⁸ Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 178 of ἔτους κγ' Ἀντωνίνου Σεουήρου τὸ προσκύνημα Ἀπολλωνίου Σωτήρος, ἱερέως γόμου καὶ βουλευτοῦ, προστατοῦ ὁμοίως Σρουπτίχιος θεᾶς γενομένου, καὶ τῶν φιλοῦντων.

vice-priest for seventeen years and as priest for twenty-three years and had, for the order and glory of the Baccheion, resigned while still living in favor of his excellency Claudius Herodes, by whom he was nominated as vice-priest.

He (the vice priest) read the statutes drawn up by the former priests, Chrysippos and Dionysios, and after the priest and head of the bacchic-devotees (*archibakchos*) and the president [προστάτου, προστάτης] had approved, they all shouted⁴⁹

Five factors make it clear that *προστάτης* in this, BDAG's second polytheistic example, refers to a leadership position:

1. Harland and Kloppenborg translate *προστάτης* here “the president.”
2. The *προστάτης* approved the decrees of the priesthood of Chrysippus and Dionysius. Only someone in leadership could approve such decrees.
3. Leadership is implied by the association of “the priest and head of the bacchic-devotees (*ἀρχιβάκχος*) and the president *προστάτης*.”
4. This statement is introduced, “Regarding the rulership of Ar. Epaphroditus.”
5. The new appointment came as a result of “Aurelius Nikomachos, who had served as vice-priest for seventeen years and as priest for twenty-three years and had, for the order and glory of the Baccheion, resigned.”

⁴⁹ Translation by Harland and Kloppenborg and Greek text accessed 7/20/2024 at <https://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/regulations-of-a-bacchic-association-the-iobacchoi/> Philip Harland, “Associations in the Greco-Roman World: An Expanding Collection of Inscriptions, Papyri, and Other Sources in Translation: [7] Regulations of the Iobacchoi (164/165 CE Athens – Attica AGRW 7 = GRA 51 = IG II² 1368 = LSCG 51 = PHI 3584 = AGRW ID# 496, Copenhagen Inventory info: 339.” ἐπι ἀρχοντος Ἀρ(ρίου) Ἐπαφροδείτου, μηνός | Ἐλαφηβολιώνος ἢ ἑσταμένου, ἀγορὰν | συνήγαγεν πρώτως ὁ ἀποδειχθεὶς | ἱερεὺς ὑπὸ Αὐρ. Νεικομάχου, τοῦ ἀνθιερασαμένου ἔτη ιζ´ καὶ ἱερασαμένου | ἔτη κγ´ καὶ παραχωρήσαντος ζῶντος | εἰς κόσμον καὶ δόξαν τοῦ Βακχείου | τῷ κρατίστῳ Κλα. Ἡρώδη, ὑφ’ οὗ ἀνθιερεὺς | ἀποδειχθεὶς [ἀν] ἔγνω δόγματα τῶν | ἱερασαμένων, Χρυσίππου καὶ Διονυσίου, | καὶ ἐπαινέσαντος τοῦ ἱερέως καὶ τοῦ ἀρχιβάκχου καὶ τοῦ προστάτου ἐξ(εβόησαν)· <https://archive.org/details/syllogeinscripti03dittuoft/page/266/mode/2up> accessed 7/23/2024.

* The third polytheistic passage BDAG cites is from the Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum, CIG 1, 126: “Let the president (προστάτης), the high priest (ἀρχιερανιστής), the scribe, the treasurers, and lawyers approve [it]. But this is appointed by lot when there is a year without a president (προστάτης).”⁵⁰

BDAG next appeals to studies by Georg Heinrici and Erich Ziebarth, but they both explain *προστάτης* as a leader with oversight over a church or a club. BDAG also appeals to G. H. R. Horsley, but Horsley identifies citations of *προστάτης*, including *O. Tebt. Pad. 67* and *I. Eph. III.668a*, that identify the president of an association.⁵¹ Horsley also cites “Sophia, ‘the second Phoibe’”⁵² and six other inscriptions or papyri about “female deacons and office-holders” published in 1979 alone.

* Horsley, p. 243 also mentions an inscription of someone “acting with (the consent of) his mother, who is described as a *prostatis*.” In this case, *prostatis* meant guardian and overseer. Both passages Horsley translates “patron” refer to leaders.

None of the examples BDAG cites for *προστάτις* means “**a woman in a supportive role**” or “*benefactor*.” Sadly, BDAG completely omits the most common meaning of *προστάτις*, “leader.”

* Even Charles Ryrie, who taught that woman’s role in church is “not a leading one,” acknowledges that *προστάτις* “includes some kind of

⁵⁰ Seth Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 180. The mention of *προστάτης* first suggests that *προστάτης* was the highest rank in the club. August Böck, ed., *Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum* (vol. 1; Berlin: Berolini, 1818), 1:173 provides the Greek text: δοκιμα[ζέ]τω δὲ ὁ πρόστατης [καὶ ὁ] ἀρχιερανιστής καὶ ὁ γ[ρ]αμματεὺς κα[ὶ οἱ] ταμίαι καὶ σύνδικοι· ἔστωσαν δὲ ο[ὔ]τοι κληρωτοὶ κατὰ ἔ[το]ς χωρὶς [τοῦ] προστά[του]. Accessed 7/20/2024 at <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/3585?hs=682-721>. Böckh, *Corpus*, 1:173 notes that the president of the college was a lifelong appointment.

⁵¹ G. H. R. Horsley, “Sophia, ‘the second Phoibe’,” *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity. A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1979. Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 4: 239–44, at 242.

⁵² Ibid.

leadership.”⁵³ This term almost always refers to an officially recognized position of authority.⁵⁴ I have not found any instance of *προστάτις* meaning “benefactor” anywhere in surviving Greek literature. Of course, in light of Phoebe’s generosity with both her time and money in delivering this letter to Rome, one could reasonably call her a benefactor. But “benefactor” is not an established meaning of *προστάτις*, nor is it what Paul calls Phoebe here. He calls her a “leader of many, including me.” A ninth-century Arabic translation of *προστάτις* reflects this: “in authority over many and over myself as well.”⁵⁵

BDAG’s entry for the masculine form *προστάτης* lists only the meanings “one who looks out for the interest of others, *defender, guardian, benefactor.*” It does not mention “leader.” Yet very instance of *prostatēs* in the Septuagint and by Josephus means “leader.”⁵⁶ I did a search near Paul’s time of inscriptions and papyri that contain *προστάτης* or a closely related cognate on Philip Harland’s website. 14 of its 18 search finding translations are “president,” 2 “leader,” 1 “presiding,” and one “patron.” The only one translated “patron” makes perfectly good sense in context if translated “president.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 140 and 88.

⁵⁴ Cf. examples in Philip B. Payne, “The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: A Response to Douglas J. Moo’s Article, ‘1 Timothy 2:11–15: Meaning and Significance,’” *TJ* 2 NS (1981): 169–97, 195; Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 310–11; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 888–89.

⁵⁵ Kenneth Bailey, “Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View,” *Anvil* 11, no. 1 (1994): 10, “qa’ ima ‘ala katherin wa ‘alayya.”

⁵⁶ Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 13.

⁵⁷ The translators are Philip A. Harland, John S. Kloppenborg, Richard S. Ascough, Ryan J. Olfert, Rebecca Runesson, and/or Patrick Stange. The 14 translated “president” are: BGU VIII 1741 (2x), BGU VIII 1742, BGU VIII 1743, GRA III 246, GRA III 198, GRA III 179, GRA III 170 (3x), PHI 285595, GRA I 49 (2x), GRA 51.

The translated “leader” are: IByzantion 37 and IKosM 466. The one translated “presiding” is GRA 51. The one translated “patron” is GRA III 227.

BDAG’s entries for both προστάτις and προστάτης misrepresent many of the passages they cite and clearly need extensive correction. BDAG needs to include the primary meaning of προστάτις, namely “leader.” Sadly, BDAG’s complete omission of the primary meaning of προστάτις, namely “leader,” misled most recent translations.

* This isn’t just my opinion. At least three Bible versions (CEV, Literal Standard Version and Young’s Literal Translation) accurately translate προστάτις “leader,” or as the American Bible Society’s Contemporary English Version does, “respected leader.”⁵⁸ Aída Spencer argues that Phoebe was a προστάτις, namely “leader.”⁵⁹ Seth Knorr examined all instances in the TLG database of Greek literature and concluded:

[I]n all of these *prostatis* examples ... the person spoken of is someone who has a superior rank, whether a ruler, magistrate, or goddess of Greek mythology. This confirms that when the word *prostatis* was used to mean *protectress*, it was really speaking of a *leader that protects* ... I haven’t found a single ... example of *prostatis*, including the examples cited by BDAG, that were translated as benefactor or could even have that meaning.⁶⁰

* Unfortunately, BDAG’s entry for “head” (κεφαλή) has also misled Bible translators and commentators. It badly misrepresents the passages it cites and omits the primary meaning of “head” Paul’s letters, namely “source.”⁶¹ I document this in my study posted at www.pbpayne.com under Publications: Articles entitled: Church Fathers Explain “Head” in 1 Corinthians 11:3 as “Source.”

⁵⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 221 incorrectly writes that “leader” “is an interpretation that is found in no English translation.”

⁵⁹ Aída Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse, Women Called to Minister* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 116.

⁶⁰ Knorr, *Women Pastors*, 11.

⁶¹ Similarly, the Louw-Nida lexicon also incorrectly defines *prostatis* as “a woman who is active in helping—‘helper, patroness...’” (1.459).

* The **seventh** thing to note is that Paul not only writes that Phoebe has been “a leader of many,” but adds “including me” (Rom. 16:2). Since Paul includes himself as having been under Phoebe’s leadership, hers was not simply a leadership role over other women. It should not be thought strange that Paul would apply to himself what he commands all believers: “yield to one another in love” Ephesians 5:21, particularly to the local church leadership in the churches he visited. Church fathers taught that even bishops must submit to other believers. The aorist tense of “has been” points to a time in the past when Paul submitted to Phoebe’s leadership, most likely when he was in the church in Cenchreae. We know that Paul had been in Cenchreae because Acts 18:18 states: “At Cenchreae he cut his hair, for he had a vow.”

* Every aspect of Paul’s commendation of Phoebe assured the church in Rome to value her as a reliable guide to the meaning of this letter to the Romans. Paul commends her as “our sister Phoebe,” as “deacon of the church of Cenchreae” and tells them to “receive her in the Lord as befits the saints.” Paul tells them to “give her support in whatever matter she may have need from you, for she has been a leader of many, including me.”

* Final slide: Want to dig deeper?