

## Appreciation for the Church (Part 1) #53

Romans 16:1-16; 21-23

We have covered much in this powerful epistle to the Romans. Many consider this to be Paul's crowning achievement, a masterpiece of doctrinal depth and spiritual enlightenment. Having offered much regarding salvation and the believer's walk with the Lord, Paul begins to conclude his thoughts, wrapping up the letter to the church in Rome. As he does, his heart is moved toward those whom he has worked with or been associated with in ministry. Paul had met a lot of people and he was thankful for each one who had shared in his life and ministry. It is evident from these closing thoughts that Paul had a deep affection and appreciation for the church. Surely this isn't an exhaustive list, but he mentions some 36 individuals in this chapter, most of them by name.

Often passages such as these are overlooked or avoided by preachers and teachers. This is really tragic. Although they don't reveal the deep, doctrinal truths of other portions of Scripture, they are beneficial for our lives. This passage in particular reveals an intimate look into the lives and daily activities of the early church. These were real people, with real struggles, striving to serve the Lord in the midst of a difficult environment. Through these passages we get a rare glimpse into early church life.

Today I want to begin looking at the [affirmations](#) of Paul in this concluding chapter as we consider: [Appreciation for the Church](#).

**I. Paul speaks of a Hospitable Lady (1-2)** – In our opening verses, Paul shares details about a lady named Phebe. Consider:

**A. The Commendation (1)** – [I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea](#). Paul commends Phebe to the Roman church. Through this commendation we discover several aspects of her character. Paul spoke of:

**1. Her Association** – Phebe is referred to as Paul's [sister](#). It is safe to assume Paul is not speaking of a physical relationship, but referring to her as a sister in the faith. She too had received Christ as Savior and Lord and was part of the church, the body of Christ.

- This may sound elementary, but it serves as a good reminder for us to appreciate everyone within the body of Christ. I have no physical relation to most of you at Fellowship, but we share a connection that will last beyond physical relations. In fact, I am actually closer to you than many

blood relatives. Sadly, we all have those within our families that are unsaved, but we will share eternity with everyone who has come to faith in Christ.

**2. Her Activity (1)** – Paul referred to Phebe as a sister in the faith and a [servant](#) within the church. Her name actually means “bright and radiant.” It is apparent that she lived up to her name. Now, being honest with the text, the word servant is translated from the Greek word *diakonos*, from which we get our deacon. However, this doesn’t imply Phebe was a deacon in the church. This same word is used of the servants who drew water for Jesus at the marriage in Cana. Paul used this same word in [Romans 13:4](#) to describe ministers in secular government. The term literally means “*to kick up dust.*” It speaks of one who is so busy in service that a cloud of dust is creating by their quick movement.

- Phebe was a devoted servant of the Lord, the church, and the Apostle Paul. Many bibles, including my *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, have a statement following V.27 of this chapter. It reads: *Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phebe servant of the church at Cenchrea.* It is apparent that Phebe actually delivered the letter by Paul to the church at Rome. We should appreciate and share such devoted activity among believers.

**3. Her Affiliation (1)** – Phebe was recognized as a [servant of the church which is at Cenchrea](#). Cenchrea was at the harbor in Corinth. It is evident that Phebe was affiliated with the local church and an active servant of that local body of believers. She identified with the local church in her community. She was not operating alone or apart from the authority and support of the church.

- This characteristic is to be admired and encouraged by the church at large. Our service, communion, and meditation should never be limited to those times when we gather corporately with the local body of Christ, but none should desire to operate independently, apart from the authority and approval of the local church. I am skeptical and concerned with those who shun the local church and refuse to submit to her authority. Phebe provides an example of devoted service under the authority and direction of the local church.

**B. The Expectation (2)** – [That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.](#) While commending Phebe to the Roman church, Paul also shared his expectation upon her arrival. He spoke of:

**1. Her Acceptance** (2) – *That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints.* This is not an unusual request. In fact it is expected of those who serve the Lord. Paul fully expected the church in Rome to receive Phebe favorably. Her faithfulness to the Lord and service to the church is to be honored and respected. She is to be received as one of them.

- I am thankful for the heart of Fellowship. Having been here several years now, I have learned of your compassion and acceptance of fellow believers. You are willing to embrace those of like faith and encourage them in the faith. There isn't a required standard that must be met, but people of all walks of life are welcomed into our fellowship. That is exactly what the Lord expects. We are serving the same Lord and promised eternal life in the same heaven. We must continue to embrace and encourage all who come within our doors, those whom God has led to our church.

**2. Her Assistance** (2) – *and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you.* Paul also encouraged and expected the church at Rome to help provide for whatever needs Phebe may have. She was to be welcomed into their fellowship and cared for as one of their own. She was to receive full acceptance and be treated with the same care and compassion as those who were already there. Phebe was not to be hindered in the work in which she was engaged.

- We have spoken at length lately about specific gifts and the diversity of the church. The church has many needs and various areas of service. It takes each of us using the particular gifts we have received to maintain the ministries of the church. Rather than being jealous or seeking to hinder others, we are to assist them in their endeavors. We must be willing to give of our gifts and abundance to help meet the needs of others. I have always believed we are responsible for our own, both spiritually and physically, in as much as we are able to meet those needs.

**3. Her Accomplishment** (2) – *for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.* Paul shares that Phebe was worthy of acceptance and honor for her devotion and dedication to the church. She was one who literally "*came alongside others in assistance.*" It speaks of "*one who guards and protects the affairs of others and assists them in their endeavors.*" Phebe had served in that role for many, including Paul himself. He knew she was committed to the wellbeing of the church and sought to assist others any way she could.

- Should that not be the desire of every believer? In fact it is something we all can do. You may not have the ability to sing or play an instrument, but you can encourage those who do. You may not be gifted to evangelize others, but you can pray and support those who do. Regardless of our area of giftedness, we all can be an encourager of others as they engage in their specific areas of service. Often a kind word of encouragement is all that is needed to continue the work.

**II. Paul spoke of an Honorable Couple (3-5)** – In these verses Paul speaks of a married couple who greatly supported and encouraged him. Consider:

**A. Their Service (3)** – [Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus](#). Paul met this faithful couple upon his arrival in Corinth. They shared the same trade, making tents, and Paul quickly formed a beneficial and lasting friendship with them. They sought ways to help Paul in ministry which was a welcomed blessing since so many sought to hinder his work. Paul was truly thankful for the committed service and friendship of Priscilla and Aquila.

- Surely each of our lives have been touched by those who helped us along the way. My life has been enriched and blessed by so many who have sought to encourage me in the faith and equip me in service to the Lord. I am thankful for the friendship and contributions of many. We all have those who seem to work against us, even discouraging our efforts, and yet there are those we can always count on to be there in our times of need.

**B. Their Sacrifice (4a)** – [Who have for my life laid down their own necks](#). Their love and devotion wasn't just spoken of; it was actually shown in a real way. We don't have biblical examples, but Paul reveals they had risked their own lives for his wellbeing. Such actions and examples of friendship are never forgotten or taken lightly. Paul appreciated their personal sacrifices for him and the ministry.

- We may not have been in a situation that required someone risking their lives to save ours, but we all have those who have made significant sacrifices for our wellbeing. We ought to be genuinely grateful for every sacrifice anyone has made on our behalf. I am especially thankful for the sacrifice Jesus made for my salvation. Such love and devotion is never forgotten!

**C. Their Standing (4b)** – [unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles](#). Priscilla and Aquila had not only been a help and blessing to Paul; they had also been a blessing to all the churches of the Gentiles. We can't know for sure, but apparently they had played a major role in the success of Paul's various ministries in planting churches. They were known as true servants of compassion by the church at large.

- I would never advocate arrogance or seeking personal recognition, but it is a blessing to have a good name among the church. We should strive to be a blessing to Fellowship, but our efforts are not limited to this body of believers. We should strive to have a good name, being known for our desire for the church at large, by sister churches as well. There is no greater joy or opportunity in life than serving the Lord and His church!

**D. Their Sanctuary (5a)** – Likewise *greet the church that is in their house*. They had a church meeting in their home in Corinth, where they met Paul. They later travelled with Paul to Ephesus and opened their home for the church to meet. It was there they instructed and helped equip Apollos in the doctrines of the faith. It now appears they have moved to Rome and once again have a church meeting in their home. Paul wanted the Romans to receive the members of their church as they received Priscilla and Aquila. There is no doubt these were committed, faithful servants of the Lord. Such commitment and devotion ought to challenge our walk with the Lord. Are we willing to sacrifice and labor as Priscilla and Aquila did?

**Conclusion:** There are many more friends and associates of Paul that we will consider, but these three have certainly challenged my walk with the Lord. They were committed to serving the Lord at all costs, and were known for their faith and commitment. How do those who know us view our walk with the Lord? Do they even know we are Christians? Are we doing all we can to serve the Lord, edify the church, and witness to those who are yet unsaved? I pray this will challenge us to become faithful, committed servants of the Lord and His church.

I can honestly say that I genuinely appreciate each of you. In your own unique way, you have made a difference in my life. I pray we will continue to grow in the faith and our love and appreciation for one another. If there are needs in your life, seek the Lord. If you have yet to receive Jesus as your Savior, respond to the call of salvation today!