

## What Makes A Great Church, Part 1 - Romans 16:1-2 – October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013

- Today, as we begin a new chapter in Romans, we begin with it, a new series I've titled, "What Makes A Great Church."
- Here in Romans chapter sixteen the Apostle Paul is about to list thirty-five people to whom he sends his greetings as he ends his letter.
- Paul's list is sort of divided in two the first of which is in verses 1-16 and the second of which is in verses 21-23 to those with him in Corinth.

- Be that as it may, I'm keenly aware how this ending chapter consisting of a list of greetings, can read like the credits at the end of a movie.
- However, before you get up and walk out please know the Holy Spirit deemed this chapter worthy of its inclusion in the canon of scripture.
- I would submit that woven into the fabric of this last list is the common thread of what makes a great church starting in verses one and two.

### 1. Faithful Woman (Verses 1-2)

(1) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. (2) I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

- v1 Paul starts off his greeting to a sister in Christ by the name of Phoebe, who was a faithful servant of the church in a city of Cenchrea.
- v2 He asks them to receive her in a way worthy of the saints, and to give her any help she needs, as she's helped many including Paul.
- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is, why this woman rises to the level of being the first one Paul greets.

Henry Morris - "Phoebe is the first of 35 personal names mentioned in this last chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans, most of whom are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. The reason that so much apparently personal information was included in the Scriptures by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is probably to illustrate the Spirit's concern with individuals. The names of all the redeemed are written in God's book in heaven (Luke 10:20 Philippians 4:3); as a token of this fact, the names of some of these saints are written in God's book on earth.

- I believe Phoebe was amongst the most, if not the most, trusted people who Paul knew, as evidenced by his trusting her with this letter.
- The reason I believe this is that he asks them to receive her, and help her, when she comes to deliver this Epistle of Romans to them.
- In other words, she's worthy of their trust such that she's worthy of Paul's trust to hand carry this life changing doctrinal book to their care.

- It appears from verse two that at some point, Phoebe had been a tremendous help to Paul in his ministry, and had proven herself faithful.
- Furthermore, it wasn't just her faithful service and trustworthiness towards the Apostle Paul it was also her service to a great many people.
- At the risk of sounding a little sexist, this begs the question of why Paul wouldn't choose a faithful and trusted man instead of a woman.

- It's important to understand in Paul's day women were not only held in low regard they were of no regard and couldn't even testify in court.
- If this isn't bad enough, Paul is choosing a woman who's named after the pagan sex goddess Dianna, which likely makes her a Gentile.
- You'll forgive my questioning the Apostle Paul's choice, but to make matters worse, it almost seems as if he's contradicting himself here.

2 Timothy 2:2 NKJV And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

- The reason I point this out and bring this up is because Paul could, in addition to being accused of hypocrisy, also be accused of partiality.
- Here's how I get there, this Phoebe lived in Cenchrea, which was an extremely wealthy port city about eight miles from the city of Corinth.
- This would seem to indicate that Phoebe herself was a very wealthy woman, and as such may have helped Paul out by giving him money.

- Lest you think I'm indicting the Apostle Paul of some improper favoritism, let me hasten to say that nothing could be further from the truth.
- Here's why, in verse one, Paul refers to her as a servant, which in the original Greek language of the New Testament is the word diakonos.
- It's where we get our English word deaconess, which means Phoebe occupied a position in the church of being a servant to others in need.

- I would suggest it was for this reason the Apostle Paul would choose to use this Gentile woman instead of a man to entrust this Epistle to.
- Let me explain, it wasn't that there were no faithful men for Paul to choose, it's that Phoebe had earned Paul's trust by her faithful service.
- Simply put, she had already demonstrated by her faithfulness and trustworthiness, that she was committed to and supporting of the church.

As one writer so aptly put it, "Phoebe had been a great help to Paul as a wealthy patron to many people including Paul. She had been a partner in the gospel, using her wealth and position to support gospel work."

The prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon echoed this sentiment, when of Phoebe he wrote, "This godly woman poured herself out for usefulness, and even the apostle was indebted to her. Should not the sisters of the household imitate her?"

- Perhaps you'll indulge me a moment longer as I take this a step further, here's what I'm thinking, Phoebe imitated Paul who imitated Christ.
- Could it be that Paul had Phoebe in mind when he wrote in first Corinthians 11:1 "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ?" I do believe so.
- Here's the bottom line, Paul's greatest trust was put in the one who was the greatest of all, vis-à-vis being the greatest servant among all.

Matthew 23:11 NKJV But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Mark 10:42-45 NKJV But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. (43) Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. (44) And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. (45) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

- In closing, I'm going to do something a little differently than usual, and give you a moment to consider with me, the following "take-away."
- We, like Phoebe, can be entrusted with the Word of God proportionate to our faithfulness and trustworthiness regardless of our resume.
- It's been said that God doesn't call the qualified, God qualifies the called, and as such, if He can choose to use a Phoebe, He can use me.