

Series: Romans

Title: Commending our Sister

Text: Rom 16:1-2

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Romans 16: 1: I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 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.

When we read a passage like this we might tend to think it is not as important as the rest. But this passage was inspired of God like the rest of Romans—like all scripture. It is full of things edifying for us to consider.

Right away it shows the love of the apostle Paul. The Holy Spirit produces love for brethren in the hearts of his people. The Spirit of God creates unity between brethren. Christ our High Priest wears our names on his heart and the Spirit makes us bear one another's name on our hearts. He makes us peacemakers, helpers, comforters of one another. We sometimes fall into a wrong spirit, saying and doing things we ought not, but God chastens us. He makes us hate strife and love unity.

A COMMENDATION

Paul says, "*I commend unto you Phebe our sister...*"

Now, Paul wrote this letter from Corinth. By commending Phebe first, and by her coming from the church at Corinth from the seaport Cenchrea, the commentaries agree Phebe was the one entrusted to deliver this letter to Rome. If that be so think of this: this was under the sovereign hand of our God. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this letter that God would include in the canon of Holy Scripture. This is an epistle God would use to call out thousands of his elect throughout the generations. And God moved Paul to entrust this letter to this sister, Phebe, to deliver it to Rome.

Travelling alone was dangerous for a woman in those days. I picture the seaport Cenchrea, in that ungodly city of Corinth, full of sailors, scallywags, scoundrels and thieves. There is Phebe carrying one of the most important epistles of the Bible. Do you think there was a remote possibility that God would allow anything to happen to this woman? No way!

Brethren as the bride of Christ, Christ has entrusted us to carry his word into all the world. Do you suppose he will allow anything to hinder us from delivering his word to those he has purposed to save? No way! Phebe was immortal and invincible by God's protection so are we in God's purpose. God will not allow anyone or anything to stop us from delivering his word to sinners that God has chosen, redeemed and predestinated to be conformed to Christ.

Paul commends her. What a good thing to be commended by your brethren! Some have turned this into a law. If you move from one church to another they require a letter of commendation. Paul said to the Corinthians,

2 Corinthians 3: 1: Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you? 2: Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: 3: *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

It is good to commend brethren moving to another church: I have done it by phone, text or email. But it is not a necessity, not a law. It is a courtesy. We live in a connected society so that we know many brethren in other congregations and they know you. So it is not a necessity. But it is certainly a blessing to have the commendation of your pastor and brethren unto others.

He calls her "*our sister.*" In the early church they spoke of elderly men as "fathers", elderly women as "mothers", younger men as "brethren" and younger women as "sisters." Here is what is important: this is

a title meaning that person was saved by the same grace of God. It means they have one and the same God the Father who chose to save them freely in Christ before the foundation of the world even as he did us. They have one Christ Jesus who justified them freely at Calvary when he saved all God's elect from our sins the same he did us. They are one who the Holy Spirit found dead in trespasses and sins but regenerated irresistibly by his grace the same as us. It is a person who is one in the same family of God in heaven and in earth, with the same heavenly Father, the same Redeemer and the same Holy Spirit as you and me.

Ephesians 2:19...of the household of God;

Eph 3:15: Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

Ephesians 4:4: *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6: One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Brethren be careful. Such a title is not to be used toward everyone. They are rare and honored titles. We do not call everyone "brethren or brother or sister", only those to whom Christ is All!

THE GREATEST OFFICE

Paul tells us that Phebe held the greatest office in the church. She was "*a servant of the church at Cenchrea...a succorer of many, and of myself also.*"

Commentaries focus on what the title "servant" means. Phoebe was not one interested titles. She did what it involved. She served the church. Phebe served them in acts of charity and hospitality. She was a succorer, a comforter, of many and of Paul also. She had a business and travelled for business. Perhaps she was well-off. But that is not what she was commended for. She was commended for being a servant and comforter of God's saints. She probably housed Paul and other apostles and brethren in her home. Phebe served her brethren when they were sick, provided for them when they needed financial help. Whatever God put in her hand to do, she did it for her brethren.

Phebe was like her Redeemer. On one occasion the apostles became angry as they disputed over why each should be the greatest in heaven,

Matthew 20: 25: But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26: But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27: And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

The Son of man came not be ministered unto. He did not have this sinful spirit of fallen men who consider themselves great and worthy to be served. Christ came to minister—to serve—by giving his life a ransom for many. He served by giving his life to pay the ransom price to redeem all his elect which was the cruel, shameful, cursed cross. Here is Christ's mind and the mind we are to have,

Philippians 2: 3...in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4: Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. 5: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: [lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than himself, not looking to provide for himself but providing for his brethren] 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...

Christ became God the Father's willing bondservant to give him the service his people could not give. Doing so he served us, provided for us, esteemed us better than himself. And Phoebe, though a successful business woman, made herself of no reputation but took the form of a willing bond servant. That is the greatest commendation you could be given—"a servant of the church, a succorer of many"—that is having the mind of Christ.

A REQUEST

Paul requested that “*ye receive her in the Lord, and assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you as becometh saints.*”

Paul says, “Receive her in the Lord...” It means receive her as you would the Lord. To be in the Lord is to be one with the Lord. Christ said what you do to the least of my brethren you do to me.

It becomes saints to receive one another and assist one another—it is what we ought to do—and it is what saints do. We do not behave to “become” holy—God’s saints are already made holy, already sanctified: by God the Father in divine election, by Christ fulfilling the Father’s will by his one offering by which he perfected forever them God the Father sanctified in election and by God the Holy Spirit regenerating us and giving us a new holy spirit.

But being already made holy saints by God we behave *as becometh holiness*. Every child born of the Spirit of God has this earnest desire in his heart to behave as becometh saints. We do not dare think we have lived up to that goal. We see ourselves falling far short of it. But it is the heart and endeavor of every saint to behave as becometh saints, as becometh holiness.

Our motive is not law—it is better—the love of Christ for us. Our strength is not flesh—it is better—the power of the Holy Spirit. But all who are sanctified put endeavor to live as becometh saints, not to live like an unbeliever.

Ephesians 4: 17: This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 18: Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: 19: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20: But ye have not so learned Christ; 21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23: And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24: And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. 25: Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. 26: Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27: Neither give place to the devil. 28: Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. 29: Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30: And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 31: Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.

Ephesians 5: 1: Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2: And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 3: But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

Concerning ourselves, we should put forth effort to put off our old man and put on the new as if it all depended upon us alone to do it while knowing and confessing to God we cannot do it except the Spirit of God enable us. We ought never excuse our own sins by saying we can only do what the Spirit enables us to do. It is true that if we do so, the Spirit of God gets all the glory. But sin is no one’s fault but our own. And that should be our attitude concerning ourselves.

But concerning our brethren, we should be “*kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*” With a brother remember Christ has put away their sin and they are righteous. In Christ they are unable to sin before God. When a brother sins we should remember that it is their sinful flesh and they can do nothing but what the Spirit of God enables them to do. But trust them to Christ their Master who is able to chasten them and make them stand.

That is what “becometh holiness”—it is to receive our brethren be they commended or be they overtaken in a fault—receive them being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving our brethren when they sin, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. “*Walk in love*” by laying down our life to serve and comfort erring brethren like Pheobe did. Even “*as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor.*” This is putting on the new man and putting off the old; the opposite toward sinning brethren is putting off the new and putting on the old. Here are other scriptures where this phrase “as becometh saints” is translated other ways.

Ephesians 4:1: I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2: With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 1:27: Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28: And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. 29: For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; 30: Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Colossians 1:10: That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11: Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

1 Thessalonians 2:12: That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

3 John 1:6: Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

Amen!