

Communications among the godly (Quality: Average)

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Preacher: Salkeld H (1898 - 1995)

[0 : 00] Would you kindly turn again to Paul's Epistle to the Romans and the last chapter, chapter 16. And as the Lord may be pleased to help, may we consider the first two verses there, verses 1 and 2.

The 16th chapter, Paul's Epistle to the Romans. I commend unto you, Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church, which is at Centria, that ye receive her in the Lord, and become a saint, that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you for.

She hath been a sufferer of many, and of myself also. This last chapter of Paul's inspired Epistle to the Romans is certainly unusual among all the Epistles, especially because of all these names which he writes of here in this ending of his Epistle.

Just briefly, to notice a little about the Epistle itself, we're told at the end that it was written to the Romans, that is the Roman believers, from Corinthus, and sent by Phoebe, servant of the church, at Centria.

of course, as you would remember, Corinth, or Corinthus, was a large port and city, seaport, the southern end of Greece, as we understand it now.

[2 : 16] Centria was a small, very much smaller town, only a few miles from Corinth. And clearly, there was a Church of Christ at this little place in Centria.

And we would gather that the church at Corinth was much larger, much more numerous. Well, that is so far, but in verse 22, we read, I, Tertius, who wrote this Epistle, salute you in the Lord.

Well, perhaps some say, surely it was Paul's Epistle. Well, yes, but clearly, Paul didn't write it down.

The Apostle must have dictated this wonderful Epistle to the Romans, and this man, Tertius, wrote it down at Paul's dictation.

So, this Tertius, then, was concerned in the Epistle. He wrote it, the Apostle inspired it, and this godly woman, Phoebe, servant of the church at Centria, was the one who conveyed it, to Rome itself.

[3 : 50] And so, the Apostle, at the beginning of these greetings and salutations, he mentions her at the beginning.

And he says, I commend unto you, Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church, which is at Centria.

Well, we gather then, this dear woman was a member of the church of Christ at Centria. The Apostle Paul esteemed her as a sister, our sister, that is in the Lord.

and it was to this godly woman that was committed the tremendous task, and I use that word rightly, I hope, of conveying this weighty Epistle to Rome from Corinth.

Just briefly, very young people here are interested in geography, and they look at a map of this district, and notice where Corinth is, and then notice where Rome is, and then they might well say to themselves, how ever did this woman Phoebe reach Rome from Corinth?

[5 : 19] Overland, it would have been almost humanly impossible through mountainous country, infested with bandits and robbers.

So, the only feasible way was by sea across to the foot of Italy, three to four hundred miles sea journey there, and then right up the mainland of Italy as far as the city of Rome, another four hundred miles at least by land.

Now you think, no railway, no cars, no planes, it had to be done on foot. And one cannot help feeling that the dear apostle Paul, when he committed his letter, we know not how long it had taken Paul to write this great epistle to the Romans, but at the end of it, as Tertius wrote the last word, and it was folded up, no doubt, on parchment, woman, and then carefully sealed and taken, no doubt, in whatever means was available then, to wrap it up, and then handed to Phoebe, this godly woman, I commend unto you

Phoebe. So as she conveyed the letter, and then we hope and trust we will be sure, she reached Rome, because the Christians there received it, and here we have it.

there's just one little side glance, dear friends, upon the circumstances that prevailed at that time.

[7 : 26] Our Bible, our New Testament, didn't come easily, did it? All the labours, the prayers, the endurances, the trials, that must have attended it.

We read godly men of old wrote as they were and they're of the Holy Spirit. And what a wonderful favour for you and me, beloved friends, to have the precious word of God.

We used to sing as children, precious Bible, what a treasure does the word of God afford. All I want for life and pleasure, strength, and all the rest is all here.

So then, I commend unto you, Phoebe, when she arrived in Rome, and this letter was open, the believers began to read it, and this would be what they would read at the end of it, as though to say now, don't forget the one who bore it, the one who endured all those miles, those neighbours, those suffering, that you might receive this inspired epistle, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Well then, as you've noticed, further, the apostle, he refers to others, and he refers to each one separately by name.

[9 : 18] Just on that point, dear friend, you know, it's very human, isn't it, to like to be remembered by name? And when we receive a letter that perhaps is not addressed to us particularly, it's good when perhaps we'll remember somebody else's epistle, and the receiver of that particular letter says, oh, they wish to be remembered to you.

And you know, it's especially if they're godly people, the writer and the receiver, well, it means very much.

Well, then the apostle says, we, Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own nets, unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Well, it goes on, we need not stay and labour on that point, but there's just one thing that I feel is very, very important in all these names.

You know, it would be easy, so to speak, to read this last chapter and say to ourselves, well, all these names, we don't know who they were, they mean nothing to us, don't they, don't they?

[10 : 58] All dear friends, if they don't, it's a sad and solemn thing to you and me, I venture to say. And surely these people who bore these names, not just names, but they were all poor sinners like you and me, and every one of them, and I'm sure what is not erring here, every one of those mentioned here, were sinners called by grace, and graciously taught of the Holy Spirit to know and feel their need of a Saviour.

and so you'll notice that all the way through this last chapter this expression keeps appearing and it is just these few words in the Lord, in the Lord, it's all in the Lord.

Well, you find it as you go along through the chapter, salute Herodian, my kinsman, greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.

Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who lay there in the Lord, it's all his gracious work. These poor souls, ah, they were once poor, but they've been enriched by grace.

And you know, divine grace, saving grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, oh, how enriching it is.

[12 : 53] It makes a poor sinner rich when the Spirit says to you and me that he, the Lamb of God, though he were rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that he through his poverty, that poverty of his, might be made rich.

Oh, how enriching is that precious blood, the blood of atonement, and oh, when that blood is applied by the Spirit to our poor, troubled, guilty hearts and consciences, powerfully, and it's true, isn't it, when to me the word is applied, it's that it does me good, and only then, but you see, when it is applied, oh, how wonderful to see how it removes the fear, it takes away the stain.

Oh, yes, there is a fountain, we sing it, do we feel it, dear friend, there is a fountain, filled with blood, blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stain.

Now, I am persuaded that all these people here, though we never knew them, we had their names set before us, they were among those you find in the prophecy of Isaiah, Isaiah, and Isaiah says that all God's dear people, they will speak of him, and they will say that in the Lord have I righteousness and strength, even to him shall men come, that's their language, and we're persuaded it was the language of these people, they saw that it was all in the Lord Jesus, all their hope of salvation, both for time and eternity, all lay in here, it's in Christ, and so,

Tertius, who we read, who wrote this epistle, you notice what he said, I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you, in the Lord, it's in the Lord, in him alone, well, you know, what a blessed company these were, you think, this was Rome, pagan Rome, and here was a company, a body of poor sinners, brought together, taught by grace, led to flee from the wrath to come, that they might lay hold on the hope set before them in the gospel, and here they were, what a company, I just briefly mentioned one verse, and that is verse 23, where we read,

[16 : 25] Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you, well, that was from Corinth, Gaius was a Corinthian then, he wished to join with the apostle Paul in sending greetings to the brethren and sisters in the Lord in Rome, Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you, that is, this man, we just have his name here, but we're told quite a lot about him, that is, that he was freely willing, lovingly willing, to entertain God's dear people, and he became known as the host of the whole church, saluteth you, and then Erastus, the chamberlain of the city, saluteth you, you think,

Corinne, that great, important city and port in Greece at this time, here was the chamberlain, the treasurer of that city, I suppose it would be right to say, that the treasurer of that city, holds one of the most important posts, in the city of Bath, very important, well paid, and most exacting, well, Erastus, was like that, here, he was a child of God, then, here was a man in a high position, oh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but I sometimes felt, what a mercy it says, not any, some, some, and Erastus was one of them, and then you think, it ends thus, and

Cortus, a brother, Cortus, who was Cortus, we don't know anything, but just this one thing, that he was written among the brethren, Cortus, nothing to say about it, his position, his occupation, no, but just this, Cortus, a brother, I remember reading that some time ago, and this strange feeling came over me, oh, what a mercy, if I'm among the unknowns, yet to be known as a brother, a brother in the Lord, among the brethren, one of the family, of the living God, and you know, that will be our eternal mercy, wouldn't it, oh, if we're among the family, the family of God, however low we feel to be, however little, however unesteemed, well, the apostle said, he felt that himself, he said, this was his commendation, as unknown, and yet he said, well, no, as having nothing, and yet possessing all things, well, then, the letter closes there, the grace of our

Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen. Then, may we just notice again, the word regarding this Phoebe.

Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church, which is at Centuria, and she evidently had expressed a willingness to undertake this hazardous, dangerous journey from Corinth to Rome.

[20 : 45] Now, I'm sure that she knew much of the contents of this epistle, and Paul's epistle to the Romans is largely based, on the one hand, on man's solemn fall in our first parent, Adam, man's uttering ability to do anything, to retrieve himself, to save himself, but under the curse of a broken law, and then the apostle goes on to show that where sin so much abounded, grace did much more abound.

And you remember how the apostle put it, ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, all if we know it, and if the Spirit of God has shown that grace to you and me, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.

Well then, I commend unto you Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church, which is at century, and that ye receive her in the Lord.

You notice there's the expression, receive her, not as a messenger, not as a deliverer of this epistle, but receive her in the Lord, in the, and in humble favour, and realise that God has overruled this matter, and her prayer on her behalf, not only her own, but the prayers of many, she might be brought safely, and that this epistle might be delivered to the place to which it was sent, that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints.

Well, dear friends, how right it is, isn't it? and if we esteem each other for Christ's sake, if you and I are given that grace to receive the Lord's dear people as we gather with them, meet them, and hope we seek their good in prayer, we should surely seek to receive them in the Lord, in his name, for his sake.

[23 : 42] And what a solemn thought, isn't it? That every redeemed sinner, every real child of God, everyone born of the Spirit, made anew in Christ, is, or should be, a witness of Christ.

ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, or what sort of a witness are you and me, dear friends?

We sometimes sing, you know, so let our lips and lives express the holy gospel we profess.

Oh, I've sung it many a time, and yet when I think of it, makes one tremble to feel that, in spite of the words, oh, how opposite one's life often seems to be, how different from what we would be, how opposite to what we often feel to be, and should be.

Well, that ye receive her in the Lord, as become a saint, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you, for she hath been a sufferer of many, and of myself also.

[25 : 19] You can almost feel here, these words of the apostle, how he had value, and highly appreciated the kindness and the loving care of such a godly woman as Phoebe, who clearly, in the Lord, gave herself up to honour him, and to do his gracious will, and to be used, if it might please the Lord, to use her in the humblest position, for the good of his dear people, and for his honour and glory.

Only a day or two ago, at one of our chapels in Wiltshire, there is a godly aged widow lady, member of this particular cause, and she is the one who usually entertains the ministers and others, and she said to me, she's a most humble-minded woman, and we've known her for many, many years, and she said, you know, I have begged the Lord, that in however humble and simple a way, I might be enabled to honour the Lord in honouring his dear people, in opening this house as a place of rest and comfort by the way, and I said, well, dear friend, you've been doing it for many years now, you know, she's one who thinks little of herself, one who's often writing bitter things against herself, but this is one thing that she has desired to do, however humble it may appear, to entertain at her table

God's servants and others of his dear people as and when she can. Well, Paul said Phoebe, for she hath been a sufferer of many and of myself also.

Now, don't you feel, dear friend, that we as a cause and a people have much cause to thank God for such as Phoebe.

You find them here and there. in fact, what a mercy it is when you come across these godly souls who are taught vitally the vital truth of God in Christ and whose hearts are touched by that grace and love of his and they desire to follow their Lord, to do what they may, in his great name.

[28 : 46] So, I commend unto you Phoebe, our sister. I feel here that we might well pray for a moment and consider this commendation and it's a commendation of the inspired apostle Paul concerning a godly woman whom he calls our sister, servant of the church, which is accentuate.

It's his commendation, not hers. Now, you know, there's a vast difference, isn't there? Not he which commendeth himself shall be received, but whom the Lord commended.

Oh, what a difference there is there, beloved friends. How solemn it is when you hear one who makes a profession of the religion of Jesus Christ commending their babes, commending themselves, speaking as it were highly of what they are doing and have been doing for the Lord.

Lord. It made me think the other day of Jehu, the time of the prophet, was it not the prophet Elijah? And Jehu said to the prophet, behold, my seal for the Lord.

And you know, you do hear sometimes, those who make a profession of religion actually speaking, in such terms as that, oh, see what I have done.

[30 : 40] See how I received the Lord. I accepted his offer of salvation and so on, and oh, how puffed up they become, how proud because of themselves.

and it's a sad and solemn thing, isn't it, that such, unless the Lord works a mighty change, or what will be their end.

But, you see, when the Lord commends, and it is his commendation here, I commend unto you, Phoebe, our sister.

and, you know, then, and then only, it's good, isn't it, it's the Lord's word. He lays his hand of commendation upon a poor sinner.

And it's often, you know, those who are thus commended of him, who just feel to be less of the least. Wasn't it Paul himself, who said on one occasion, rather wrote, that he felt to be less than the least of all saints, and not worthy to be called an apostle.

[32 : 04] Well, I don't know how you feel, dear friend, in these things, but does that strike a chord in your heart and mine, less than the least, not worthy to be called one.

No, and yet you are. And it's the Lord who does the calling, isn't it? And it's he who does the commanding, I command, and whom he commends, they surely shall be commended.

so I commend unto you, Phoebe, our sister. Wouldn't it be good, dear friends, if there were many a Phoebe among us?

In fact, we hope there are, secretly, perhaps. And of course, those who are really so, they don't make a show of it.

No, they're willing to be nothing, that Christ may be all and in all, all to be made willing to be nothing, willing to take the lowest place.

[33 : 23] And that's what the Lord said, when they are called to a feast, don't go up to the highest part of the table, and sit at the lowest sea.

And when he who has called the guest seeth thee there, he'll say to thee, friend, come up higher, come up higher.

You've taken a very low place. You feel not to be worthy of anything more, not even that, but now that the master calls and he says, come up higher, ah, what a mercy to be commended thus, isn't it?

And not the reverse. So, I commend unto you, Phoebe, our sister. Our sister.

And have you thought, beloved friends, that this term is a very family term, isn't it? Our sister. A sister is one of the family.

[34 : 31] And, again, the brother, the brother and sister, they belong to the family. Naturally speaking, you see, brothers and sisters, however different they may be and often are, they can't be separated in this matter.

That blood is thicker than water, isn't it? and in the matter of our never-dying soul, all to be numbered in the family, to be known by the Lord's dear people.

Well, might we say, as a brother beloved, a sister beloved. And, you know, there's much grace in this term.

There is a family of God on earth whose father fills a throne and those seed of heavenly birth, they are that little known.

No, and I can't help feeling it's a good thing that if we are among that family, we're not all that well known. How sad it would be, wouldn't it, if you and I had a name to live in the world and among worldly people, and that we had, as it were, one foot in his church and another very firmly rooted and planted in the world that lies in wickedness.

[36 : 14] And I'm sure that if these things come home to us, dear friend, our brought home, it'll be our earnest prayer, Lord, deliver me from that double-mindedness, make me real, make me sincere, or let me be, dear Lord, a real Christian.

What is it to be a real Christian? To be washed in the Redeemer's blood, to be separated, from all that is of the flesh and of the world, come ye out, that's the word, isn't it, to the brethren and sisters in the Lord, come ye out of it, and be not partakers of their sins.

How easy it is to be deceived, and perhaps some might say yes to deceive ourselves, and perhaps that's easier still, or may the dear Lord deliver us from self-deception, and make you and me real, all to be made real Christians, godly, sincere, and honest before our gracious God.

Well then, that ye receive her in the Lord. Now, it's a wonderful blessing, I hope you would agree, dear friends, when we can receive one another in this way, that is, in the Lord.

I remember many, many years back now, in our early days at Brantford-on-Aden, there was a very infirm, crippled lady, and she was related to Mr.

[38 : 22] and Mrs. Champion. I think the relationship was on his side. She was a crippled, very infirm, and they had a close connection with Brantford-on-Gifford Chapel, and she was, for a season, staying with relatives, this poor, crippled person, at Brantford-on-Gifford, and she was strangely overcome during one service there, and she had never been a member of any cause, but then her heart was touched very mightily by grace, and she had a most strong desire within her that she might join them there, and be found among them there.

She seemed to feel a spiritual home was among those dear people, people, and she applied to the deacons, and they wrote to me, asked me if I'd be willing to come to a church meeting in regard to this matter, the senior deacon read out the letter that this dear gracious soul had written to the deacons.

In it, she more or less said, I am so crippled, so infirm, that I must confess I dare not face the water of baptism.

She said, I know the Lord could bring me through, but I dread it, and I do just beg and ask you if you would be willing to allow me to sit down at the Lord's table with you on receipt of my written testimony.

Well, there was a written testimony with the letter, and it was read out, and you know, at the end of that testimony, I don't think one of us had a dry eye.

[40 : 55] It was gracious, feeling, humble, and real, and the deacon said to me, what do you feel about this?

And I said, well, dear friend, my own feeling, and it's only mine, I can't press it on you, but my own personal feeling is, it will be right to receive her under these circumstances, and allow her to join with you at the table.

and they conferred among themselves, and they all came to the same opinion, yea, receive her in the Lord, all for the work of grace that is evident in her soul.

And so, this dear lady became an exception, and I believe sometimes, you know, it is so, and it's good, you know, when in love and feeling desire, we can stretch a little here and there, and yet retain the rule still among us.

Well, receive her in the Lord, as become a saint, and that your sister in whatsoever business she hath need of you, for she hath been a sufferer of many, and of myself also.

[42 : 41] Well, now, dear friends, do you know anyone of this nature? Can you say, well, I believe I am acquainted with one and more than one who fit in here, who appear just like this godly woman, and they have been so to me, and I have had cause to thank God for the grace of God revealed and shown in them.

Ah, we say how good it is when that grace shines forth. you know, Phoebe, the name Phoebe, I believe, signifies something that is shining and pure.

That's the actual meaning of the name Phoebe. And, on the one hand, this dear woman was a shining example, wasn't she, to the Lord's dear people.

but then, what about her purity, holiness? Ah, I am sure as taught by grace, she would be ready to say, ah, her holiness was all in Christ, that he was made unto her.

Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, it was he and not herself. So, receive her in the Lord, for she hath been a sufferer of many, and myself also.

[44 : 30] I can't help feeling just in closing, or how good it is, as we journey on, you and I, in life's journey. Gather, Sabbath by Sabbath, among the Lord's dear professing people, when you find among them, one and another, that answers to this description, this godly woman.

Now, you can be sure, the Apostle Paul thanked God for her. He was full of gratitude, not only to her, but to her God.

God, and, you know, how we feel it, don't we? When we become well acquainted, some of the Lord's dear people, whose hearts are so warmly touched by grace, and they're ready to give themselves up, that they might serve the Lord by serving his own dear people.

one says, O, what can I do, my Saviour to praise, so faithful and true, so plenteous in grace, so good to deliver, so kind to redeem, the weakest believer that hangs upon him.

well, she hath been a sufferer, quietly, perhaps secretly, she's been a gracious helper, and the Lord has touched her heart, and made her profitable and useful to the family of God.

[46 : 24] God, and so I feel I must leave it here, see the time is passing, and would beg the dear Lord to pardon anything that he has seen amiss, and pray that his blessing may attend the work that we have before us, and dear friends, that we might learn by these things, that you and I might be strengthened in the inner man, as we read such things as thee, strengthened with all might by his spirit, as the apostle wrote in the inner man.

May the Lord add his blessing for his name's sake. Amen.