

“He Doesn’t Forget You”

October 20, 2019

Hebrews 6:1-12

I’d like to take a moment again today to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to present God’s Word and to also say thank you for your attentiveness. God’s Word is the most important book in the world and we need to know it. So, thank you.

Please find with me the sixteenth chapter of Romans.

He loved a Ford. You’ll all likely remember Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker of the infamous bank robbery duo, Bonnie and Clyde. Apparently Clyde Barrow was very skillful at high speed driving, which, of course, was part of the reason he could evade the police after he’d robbed a bank. And, not only was he a very good driver, his favorite car both to steal and use as a getaway car was a Ford.

On April 10th, 1934, forty-three days before his death at the age of 25, he wrote a letter to Henry Ford. Clyde couldn’t write very well, but in between heists and killings, he is said to have taken the time to send a letter to Henry Ford. He praised Mr. Ford for manufacturing his favorite ride; a V8, model B Ford.

Dear Sir:

While I still have got breath in my lungs I will tell you what a dandy car you make. I have drove Fords exclusively when I could get away with one. For sustained speed and freedom from trouble the Ford has got every other car skinned and even if my business hasn’t been strictly legal it don’t hurt anything to tell you what a fine car you got in the V8—

Yours truly, Clyde Champion Barrow [Found on <https://www.snopes.com>].

It’s likely been a long time since you composed a hand-written letter? Yes, maybe a postcard.

This is from Mr. Sam Austin, a workforce practitioner (someone who tends to interpersonal relationships in the workplace). “Do you still hand write letters anymore? Yes! There is really no substitute for receiving a handwritten letter. I wrote scores of them in my youth, and a few years back I lamented online that much of our digital malaise could be remedied by a few good old fashioned handwritten letters in our mail-boxes. I offered to write to anyone who gave me their address and pledged to write back, and I’m happy to report that about ten people took me up on my offer, and only one failed to reply. A few even kept it going for more than one exchange. And I write my mother a handwritten letter every month.” [Found on <https://www.quora.com> “Do you still hand write letters anymore?”].

So, by and large, letters written by hand are nearly a thing of the past.

Romans, like all the NT Epistles, was hand-written. Now, have you ever, in a hand-written letter, told the recipient of your letter a lot of good things about some people you both know? How about a hand-written letter that contained the names of thirty-three friends? I know someone who did just that. And I’d like you to see his letter.

I’ve titled today’s message “He Doesn’t Forget You.” Shall we pray?

The letter with references to thirty-three friends is the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Paul carried on a huge correspondence in his life after he became a Christian. And he closes this letter and, as we now know, this greatest book ever written, with a few choice words about some of his best friends. Look with me at the first verse of this sixteenth chapter. 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 [helper] of many, and of myself also."

The Bible is filled with people. So, in part, it's a study on people. And why study people? We study people for at least two reasons. One, because, when you study people, you broaden your understanding of yourself. And two, because, when you study people, you discover the specific things you admire. And the things you admire in others are the qualities that make you who you are.

Now, how many people do you know? How many do you *think* you know? The New York Times reports (Feb. 18, 2013) that a survey (of sorts) done a number of years ago by Columbia College concluded that the average person knows about 600 people. But, of those 600, the study concluded, there were only 25 that you could count on [Found on <https://www.nytimes.com> "TAKE A NUMBER - *The Average American Knows How Many People?*" by Andrew Gelman]. The previous study by the same College years earlier concluded that the average American only knew 290 people.

Pew Research says that the average Facebook user has 245 friends [Found on <https://www.theatlantic.com> "The Average American Knows 355 More People Than She Has Facebook Friends". Then, I found another survey which determined that most people know 259 people [found on <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov> "How many people do you know? Efficiently estimating personal network size"].

The real answer is this. After all the research, nobody knows.

What we do know, though, is this. The Bible tells us that the names of many of the people associated with the Apostle Paul. There are about 110; (at least that's how many people

we know are referenced in the Book of Acts and Paul's N.T. Epistles).

And, of those 110 people, 33 of them are mentioned right here in this hand-written letter called the Book of Romans.

Now, the Holy Spirit is the One Who inspired the Scripture. No, Paul was not inspired by the Spirit. Rather, as he wrote, the Holy Spirit moved him to write only the Word of God when he wrote these letters to the Churches. And, even though the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write these exact words, He didn't dictate to him what he should say. Rather, Paul's own personality, his desires, and even his ability as a writer come through in his letters.

We all know people through other people. And what we find here in Romans sixteen is a list of greetings and salutations to thirty-three people that Paul personally knew. Nine of them were Paul's friends that had traveled with him. And the other 24 were living in the city of Rome; people he'd never met. Even though Paul hadn't yet been to Rome when he wrote this letter; he knew people through the people he worked with in the various Churches throughout the empire.

Now, you might not think it's that important to know the friends of the Apostle Paul, but keep in mind that it was the Holy Spirit that inspired these words. So, God must have included them in His Word for us to learn from.

Paul begins with a woman by the name of Phebe; verse one.

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 [helper] of many, and of myself also."*

It's likely that you don't know someone named Phoebe because it's not a very common name. But, according to one source, "In Detroit, there really is a lady named Phoebe B.

Beebe. Now, if Phoebe had a bee. And the bee were lost, we might say “Where can Phoebe B. Beebe’s bee be?” [Found on “The Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field November 22, 1922 Google Books <https://books.google.com/books?id=HG4xAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA756&lpg=PA756&dq>].

Actually, Phoebe B. Beebe was born in 1954. She’s a chimpanzee and she was a mascot for NBC’s Today Show from 1953 through 1957. And then, of course, a “Phoebe B. Beebe” doll was created for children in the fifties. And, you can get one today on eBay for ninety cents.

So much for the name. What really matters is the commendation Paul gives to this lady.

First, then, her character; verse one.

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

Let me begin with the word “commend”? It means “to stand together with.” Do you recall the day Jesus was transfigured on the mountain near Galilee? Here’s what Luke tells us. Luke 9:32 *“But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that **stood with him.**”*

To commend someone is to “stand with them and to stand by them.” We do something very similar in our day when we write a letter of recommendation for someone.

By the way, for Paul to elevate a woman in this way in the First Century A.D. is a clear indication that Paul didn’t think much about the P.C. of the First Century. A woman’s place in the first century A.D. was usually in the home unless you were a Queen or a Princess.

One authority puts it like this. Women “were restricted for the most part from holding political offices. Women were always legally and theoretically subordinate to men. Women of the upper classes were able to become educated. This increased the possibility of their being respected by men. The

status of women in Roman society was never in fact, however, equal to that of men.” [Found on <http://www.myntbc.org> “Phoebe: Was She A Church Leader” by Jismyl Lam].

You see, to be politically correct in those days, typically, women were usually not acknowledged as important as men. But, that’s not true in Scripture; especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul. As a matter of fact, read through Romans sixteen this afternoon and you’ll find that there are at least ten women mentioned here. So, no P.C. with the Apostle Paul.

And it’s very important that Paul say he stood with his friend Phoebe. But, there’s someone more important here.

II Corinthians 10:12 *“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that **commend** themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (18) For not he that **commendeth** himself is approved, but whom the Lord **commendeth.**”*

Who is it that the LORD commends? Who does He stand by? He stands by the one who has confidence in Him. He stands together with the one who isn’t boasting and bragging about himself.

Here’s what Solomon wrote about this. Proverbs 27:2 *“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”*

The Apostle Paul held Phoebe in high esteem. And the reason was one thing; her character. She’s both trustworthy and honor worthy.

Now, just a word here about Paul’s commendation. He certainly wasn’t one to commend someone so highly if it wasn’t true and if they didn’t deserve it; especially another woman; especially someone other than his wife; and especially if he couldn’t trust them. But, he was a man of

honor and, because he knew the character of this woman, he could pay a tribute to her.

And Paul tells us three things about Phoebe's character. One, she was a sister. Two, she was a servant. And three, she was a succourer of many.

Here's what's on my heart today.

First, Phoebe, the sister. This means that Phoebe was a Believer in Christ as all those who belong to Christ are brothers and sisters. We, too, are part of the one, eternal family, united by blood, the blood of the Lamb, the LORD Jesus.

The Church in the New Testament is more than a community. It's a family. We are brothers and sisters in the LORD.

Romans 14:10 *"But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? ... (15) But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died (21) It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."*

The family of Believers is extremely important to Paul. Above everything else, Christians are to love as brothers and sisters. Romans 13:8 *"Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."*

When we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we have fulfilled God's law.

Now, many people believe that Phoebe was the one who carried the Epistle of Paul to the Romans to Rome. We know that Tychicus carried Paul's Epistle to the Colossians to Colosse (Colossians 4:7-9) and that Epaphroditus carried the Book of Philippians to Philippi (Philippians 2:25-30). The First Epistle to the Corinthians was carried to Corinth by his friend and protégé Timothy (I Corinthians 4:17) and possibly Titus (II Corinthians 12:18) carried II Corinthians. And,

although we aren't specifically told who carried this epistle to Rome, it's been the consensus of Bible scholars over the years that it was Sister Phoebe. This is only conjecture. There is a woman named Phoebe, of course. But, there's no statement in Scripture that she was the one who took Paul's letter to Rome.

But, this might just be why she is listed first in the list of names here. She could have been the one who carried Paul's letter to Rome. So, what does Paul say to the Romans?

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, ..."*

First, then, Phoebe is a sister in the LORD.

Second, Phoebe is a servant of the LORD; vs. 1

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

Paul first arrived by ship at the harbor in Cenchrea. Acts 18 tells us that Paul traveled to Cenchrea on his second missionary tour. And, after he had preached the Gospel in the city of Corinth, he traveled nine miles south to get on a ship and sail to Syria. He boarded that ship in Cenchrea. And, by the way, if Phoebe was the person who carried the Book of Romans to Rome in 57 A.D., she would have had to travel no less than seven hundred miles to get to Rome.

Today Cenchrea has a population of less than 300. It must have been larger and more prosperous than it is today. But, either way, it's possible that Phoebe came from a small town with a small Church. But, with God, size is not as important as character.

You see, Phoebe exemplifies servanthood. And among all the things you already know about servanthood, this is a part of it. God doesn't forget you. When it comes to fame and worldly renown, many in this world may know your name. But, in the books of Heaven, Phoebe's name is held high.

Here's a word on this subject. Hebrews 6:10 *"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."*

Folks, please remember that God remembers. Actually, He sees everything you do. And, when it comes to serving people, He tells us in His Word that He won't forget you. Others may, but He will not.

We don't know exactly what Phoebe did to garner the title servant. But, whatever it was, it is the very thing that Paul honors in the greatest book ever written.

And, do you remember how Paul described himself in the first verses of this epistle? Romans 1:1 *"Paul, a **servant** of Jesus Christ ..."*

And here's I Corinthians 9:19 *"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself **servant unto all**, that I might gain the more."*

Doesn't that say something to you about you? When it comes to fame and earthly renown, do you really want the recognition?

Servants are not usually well-known, let alone, famous for serving.

And, who comes to your mind when you read the word "servant"? Is it Mr. Belvedere? Or, was it Alfred in the Batman series?

Does anyone here remember Bernardo? You only remember Zorro. "Bernardo was Zorro's servant. He cannot speak, he is short and totally dedicated to Zorro. So it does not matter to him that he has a lot going against him, especially compared to Zorro (who is obviously wealthy when he does not wear the mask). Bernardo makes the most of his situation and become a critical character because of his loyalty and dedication. Also the fact that only Zorro can communicate with him, creates a special bond that nobody

else understand or can easily break." [Found on <https://www.quora.com/Who-are-the-most-famous-infamous-helpers/servants/butlers-Why-do-you-like-them?>].

Here are three keys, then, to servanthood. One must be obedience; don't you think? Then, loyalty and dedication. And the third, a special bond on communication between servant and the one he or she serves.

So, what kind of servant are you? Would you consider yourself an obedient one? One loyal and dedicated? And one with an eye and an ear to your Heavenly Master?

Now, notice again what Paul says about Phoebe. Romans 16:1 *"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is **a servant of the church** which is at Cenchrea: ..."*

Phoebe was a servant of the Church. The word "servant" is usually translated in the King James as "minister." No, she wasn't the minister in the modern sense of the word. She wasn't the Pastor. Rather, she served people. She met needs. She used her time and her money to invest in others.

Think about Jesus as a Servant. He spent every day serving. Everywhere you go, people have needs and the largest need is to know that someone cares. Phoebe cared. And, because of her character as a servant, she held a place of high regard in the heart and mind of the Apostle Paul.

Here's Jesus. Philippians 2:5 *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (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 ..."*

Jesus came into humanity to fulfill the role of "Servant of the LORD." He even got down on His knees and washed the dirty feet of His disciples. What kind of Person would do that? A servant.

And Jesus went to the Cross as a servant. Philippians 2:8 *"...he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

The Savior of the world was a Servant.

First, Phoebe is a sister in the LORD.

Second, Phoebe is a servant of the LORD.

And third, Phoebe is a succorer of many; verse one.

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 [helper] of many, and of myself also."*

The word succorer is an Old English term. It simply means "helper." And notice Paul says that she had helped many and she had personally helped him.

What is a succorer? It's someone, man or woman, who is a servant; but more than a servant. It's someone who serves you when you have big needs; even when you are in distress and in some sort of large difficulty. It could be a medical need or a housing need or simply a food need. A succorer might even be a nurse who tends you when you are sick. And, the succorer would typically use his or her own resources. He or she is someone who takes a genuine interest in the welfare of others.

So, can you see why Paul has such a high regard to this Christian woman? Phoebe served, not only the poor, but everyone who had a need.

Folks, Phoebe was definitely influential; but not because of her high position in society. Rather, it was because she had a heart for people. Whatever role the LORD has placed you in, you can be a means to the support and help of others around you. You might not take on the role of a succorer. But, there will always be a need for men and women like Phoebe.

Obviously Phoebe was both dedicated to the LORD and trustworthy to the Church, especially to the Apostle Paul.

What does her life story, small as it is, say to you? Can you not take on the role of a modern day Phoebe? You belong to the LORD by faith in Christ. You are a sister and a brother in Christ. And, aren't you on of the LORD's servants? Well, take it one step further and be a Phoebe, a succorer of many.

My last story is this. Matthew 25:19. It's the story in which Jesus compares your service to the Kingdom of Heaven. Here's what He says. A landowner gave each of his servants a certain amount of money to use while he was away. Then, when he returned, each servant had to give an account, a reckoning of what he did with his lord's money.

Here's Matthew 25:19 *"After a long time the lord of those **servants** cometh, and reckoneth with them. (20) And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*

*(21) His lord said unto him, well done, thou good and faithful **servant**: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (22) He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.*

*(23) His lord said unto him, well done, good and faithful **servant**; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (24) Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not straved:*

*(25) And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. (26) His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful **servant**, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not straved:*

(27) Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own

with usury (interest). (28) Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

*(29) For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. (30) And cast ye the unprofitable **servant** into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Folks, you belong to the LORD. You are, in essence, a servant. Will you be a Phoebe? God will not forget the things you do that others will likely not remember. One day you'll stand before Him and yes, He'll judge you. But here's what His greatest desire is now; that He'll say to you and me "Well done thou good and faithful servant..."

So, what will it be this week? Will you pray this prayer with me "LORD, I am Your servant. Help me to serve well today so that when that day comes, I'll hear you say to me "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enjoy thou into the joy of thy LORD."

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 496 "No One Ever Cared For Me Like Jesus"