

**ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH**  
**LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14**

**LESSON 54 – THE FAITHFUL WOMAN – Romans 16:1-2**

The first century churches were filled with faithful Christians whose identities are lost to history. In Romans 16, Paul records the names of some of these Christians, beginning with a woman who gained Paul's trust because of her life of faithful service to the Lord.

Paul begins this chapter with a commendation of Phoebe to the church in Rome. She was the one who took Paul's letter from Corinth and delivered it to Rome. Phoebe was one of the many faithful women of influence found in the Bible.

There was an influential group of women who were followers of Jesus...Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna (Luke 8). They used their resources to support Him and His ministry. Lydia was a woman from Philippi and was Paul's first recorded convert. She opened her home to Paul and it became a base of operations for him in that region. Dorcas in the book of Acts is another example of a faithful woman.

Phoebe falls into the same category of faithfulness as these other great women in the Bible. Because Phoebe is one of the names of the pagan goddess Diana, there are some who believe she was saved out of a heathen or pagan background. Let's look at some of the things that made her stand out as faithful.

**She Is A Sister**

Paul calls Phoebe "our sister." It's certainly fitting because the body of Christ is the family of God. God is our Father and we are adopted through salvation into His family. All Christians become brothers and sisters in Christ. The frequency with which Paul uses terms like brethren, brother and sister...nearly 100 times...shows that he considered this a normal practice. Phoebe was known as a strong Christian...a sister in Christ.

**She Is A Servant**

Paul describes Phoebe as "a deacon of the church" in verse 1. Most Bible scholars believe that deacons in the early church carried out ministries of hospitality and compassion...caring for travelers, the sick, the poor and those in prison. Phoebe is characterized as a servant by Paul. She must have been highly trusted to have been given the mission of delivering Paul's letter to the Romans.

Some have suggested that Phoebe was a prosperous businesswoman who was most likely traveling to Rome so was asked by Paul to deliver his letter as she went. She probably used Paul's commendation of her to introduce herself to other Christians along the way and to find hospitality with them. Paul had no way of knowing the impact his letter would have on church history. In Phoebe's luggage was what would become Christianity's single most influential document.

Someday in heaven, we can thank Phoebe for her faithfulness in keeping Paul's letter safe and delivering it to Rome...then ultimately to us.

## She Is A Saint

Paul makes sure to let the Roman Christians know that she is one of them. He tells them “to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of His people.” That’s an interesting statement. What does it mean to receive someone in this way?

**Worthy of the Gospel** – In Philippians 1:27, Paul says to “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel...” Paul clearly attaches the highest value to the Gospel of Christ. Christians are called upon to live their lives in such a way as to never distract from the Gospel. It would be good for every Christian to pray this every day... “Lord, help me to walk in a way that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus.”

**Worthy of the Lord** – In Colossians 1:10, Paul writes, “That you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.” This moves beyond the Gospel to the Lord Himself. There is no way any of us could be worthy of the Lord on our own. We would not have needed a sinless Savior to die for us if we could be worthy of God’s presence on our own. It is only in Christ...by the continual filling and guidance of the Holy Spirit...that we can live a life pleasing to the Lord.

**Worthy of the Calling** – Ephesians 4:1, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” The focus here is in the calling God has given to each of us that is consistent with our spiritual gifts. We are to fulfill our calling the way we’ve seen Paul fulfill his calling as apostle to the Gentiles. None of us is called to be an apostle today, but we are called to be teachers, preachers, missionaries, servants of mercy and love. Whatever our calling, it should be viewed as a special assignment from the Lord.

**Worthy of the Saints** – The next “worthy” challenge is found right here in Romans 16:2, “I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need...” God places as high a value on the corporate walk of worthiness of the church as He does on our individual walk. Individually, every Christian must walk worthy of Him. What we have to remember is that we have a standard of behavior we are to live by as a church as well. The way we care for and love each other...the way we minister to each other...goes a long way in helping others understand what church is all about.

**Worthy of God Who Calls You** – I Thessalonians 2:12, “Urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” Here we see the value God places on His servants. We should treat people the same way God would treat them. We are to live in a way that reflects the kingdom and glory we will one day experience. The kingdom is both here and there...

now and then...the present and the future. The kingdom was introduced by John the Baptist and Jesus but will not be experienced until Jesus comes again. In the meantime, we are to live now as we will be living then. Our kingdom is not of this world, but of the world to come.

This list of different kinds of worthiness...none of which we have in our own strength...would make a great prayer list for all of us at the start of each day. If we could walk worthy of all these measures, we would be living a life worthy of the Lord.

### **She Is A Servant To Many**

The fourth way Paul commends Phoebe is by reference to her service character. "She has been the benefactor of many people, including me." This is actually another indication that Phoebe was a woman of means and had helped many people in the church. Paul is asking the church in Rome help for Phoebe like she had been for so many in Corinth...including Paul himself.

Phoebe must have been an extremely faithful Christian. We don't know anything about her trip to Rome, or what happened afterward. What we do is that Paul would not have trusted her or commended her in such a way to the Roman church had she not been worthy in the Lord.

My prayer for myself and for all of you is that we might be worthy of being commended by others for our faithful service in the body of Christ. Whatever our role or ministry, I pray that everyone introduced to Phoebe through these verses would be motivated to become a "benefactor of many people" in a manner worthy of the Lord.