

Sunday, Sept.7, 2008
Living Hope EFC

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Working on a Heavenly Composition with Eternal Credits.
People God takes note of because of their service: Rom.16:1-16

INTRO

She was one of those grand old saints. At the church every time it was open. Busy with Christian duties. A widow for more than a decade. Dying for months, and fully prepared.

During one of her pastor's visits she said to him, "Gene, wd both know that this can't go on much longer. When I die, I want you to promise me you'll carry out a special request." "Of course," her pastor said. "I mean it Gene. I'm sure my kids won't do it." Pastor assured her he would do it.

"When the casket is opened at the funeral, and all my friends come by for a last look, I want them to see me ready to be buried with a table fork in my right hand.

Pastor Rutland must have looked puzzled...

She Continued, "I want you to tell the people...You know what it means when they clear the dishes from a big meal and someone says, 'Keep your fork.' You know something good is coming. Maybe a piece of apple pie or chocolate cake.

'Keep your fork' means something good is coming. Gene, I want to be buried with a dessert fork in my hand, It will be my way of saying, '*The best is yet to come.*'"

Four days later, she was buried with a fork in her hand just as she requested. Everyone who saw her in the casket saw her final silent witness. For her, death was not a *disaster*, but a *dessert*.

The BEST is yet to come! Romans. 8:17-18.

- Paul had been on shore (2 Cor.12). And he had suffered. And he says with authority "There's no comparison!"

Maintaining this reality in our daily lives will cause us to see & live differently here!

- The activities we exchange our time & \$ for, the priorities we keep, our willingness to share Christ with others, the people we esteem! Our commitments & behavior.

As Paul ends his letter to the church in Rome, he sends greetings to at least **26 individuals** & several house churches, who kept just such a perspective. It's like a **list of credits** at the end of a movie naming those who had a part in making the production possible.

- These credits are different.
- They didn't do it for money, but with personal sacrifice.
- They weren't professionals, but "beloved friends" (4 times).
- They weren't stars, but ordinary Christian men & women who shined for Christ's sake.
- They didn't seek worldly fame, but ended up on the list of God's "Fall of Fame."
- They were people who lived like this dear Christian widow, who died looking ahead...the best is yet to come!

Let's note the kind of people Paul commends and God lists on His Heavenly credits.

(What kind of people does God take note of?)

1: Vs.1-2, Phoebe. All we know about her is what is said here.

(1) A servant (deaconess) of the church in Cenchrea.

- Use of διακονον with the phrase "of the church" suggests she was probably in the office of deaconess.
- **Moule**: "In other writings...allusions to deaconesses are frequent. They were involved in relieving from temporal distress, teaching women's catechisms. They were set apart by laying on of hands & required to be mature (40 yrs old)."
- As the church grew, & with it needs, deaconesses emerged.

(2) A great help to many and to Paul.

- **προστατις: Helper.** The word was used in the 1st century of legal (civil rights) representatives, or wealthy patrons; of guardians and protectors.
- One who gives of her means to help others.
- **Earle, 259.** "The expression suggests that Phoebe was a person of some wealth & position who was able to act as patroness of the small church & other Christians coming through her area.
- **Cenchrea** was a port about 6 miles from Corinth, a busy place where she could have helped many traveling Christians.

(3) Commended by Paul as worthy of help.

- It is believed that Phoebe carried Paul's letter to Rome, from Corinth – where he wrote it. She may have been on business.
- "Commend" was a technical word used in letters of commendation in the 1st C, to guard against impostors. **Acts 18:27**
- She is likely one of Paul's converts while in Corinth. Paul was in Corinth for 18 mos, Acts 18:11, 18 -visited Cenchrea

POINTS

1. The church is indebted to faithful women workers in all ages!
2. Paul was not a male chauvinist.
3. The church is to take special care of its own.
4. Single women, widows, can find great esteem serving Christ.

2: Vs.3-5, Priscilla and Aquilla.. "My fellow workers in Christ."

(1) They literally "laid down (on the chopping block) their neck (τραχηλος) for my soul/life."

(2) The Gentile church is thankful for them!

(3) They have a church in their house. House churches are responsible for the growth of Christianity through the ages!

They were exemplary!

- **Acts 18:1-3** – They moved from Rome (AD50) to Corinth. Paul worked & stayed with them 1 ½ years. They probably came to Christ through Paul's teaching & had a home church there
- **Acts 18:18-19 (AD52).** They moved to Ephesus with Paul.
 - Explained Christian doctrine to Apollos –18:26.
 - When Paul came back a year later –19:1, they were still there. In 1 Cor.16:19, which Paul wrote from Ephesus, he mentions them – a church in their house.

- They went through very dangerous time in Ephesus (ch.19).

- **Romans 16** (AD 57). They are back in Rome.
-A church is again meeting in their house.
- **2 Tim.4:19** (AD66). Paul is in prison. He writes to Timothy who is pastoring the church in Ephesus & Priscilla & Aquilla are there.

WHAT DO WE LEARN?

1. 16 years after we first meet them, they are still committed to Christ and to building His church.

- We all know how discouraging it can be to continue our committed to the church! People are the same everywhere.
- The work never ends. People are always needy, imperfect. Everyone has their hang-ups (look at Corinth, their 1st church!)
- They are a picture of willing sacrifice to see God's work go on
- They were willing to use their home, \$, even to risk their necks!

Q? - How many couples do you know like this? Willing to open their homes, able to teach, gracious, hospitable, friends?

2. A look into the early church: it was not buildings – but people!

3. Christianity was a way of life, not a Sunday service.

- Life centered around serving Christ wherever they lived!

3: Vs.5-16 Paul lists many others!

Rome was the capital of the empire! It drew people from all over the world. Paul's own travels took him to many of the key cities of the day. People transient like himself. While Paul had not yet been to Rome, He knew many of the people who were there, and claimed many as his *friends*.

Clearly, Paul was a man with a deep concern for people!

Vs.5- Epenetus: My dear friend, first convert in Asia.

- How special are those we've led to Christ!
- We never know how God will use them.
- **Q: Who is your first convert? Do you want to have more?**

Read through V.6-16. NOTE:

(1) Paul's ministry was to people in a variety of locations and places in life: socially, economically, races. All are important.

(2) What affection & esteem Paul had for all Christians! **(Rom.12:9)**

(3) **Q:** If Paul had known you, what would he have written about you? How would he remember & describe your contribution to Christ's church?

Film: Mr. Holland's **Opus**.

Glenn Holland had been a musician for 20 yrs. He wanted to write an Opus: a musical composition, a piece of music for the symphony that would leave his mark on American music.

- He decided to teach for 4 yrs to save enough money that he could take time off to write his Opus.
- BUT...His wife got pregnant. He bought a house. Gained a burden to teach kids to love music. Had a son – born deaf. Started a marching band. Struggled to write a few notes when he could a little time by himself.
- Life was consumed with the daily needs of other.
- At age 60 the principal informed him they had to make some budget cuts, the entire drama & music dept was eliminated.
- As he looked back over 30 yrs...it made absolutely no sense!
- He has been forced to teach & didn't like it at first. Then he came to love it – the only thing he wanted to do! Now this!
- After 30 yrs he was so unappreciated that they cut his de- partment, and in the meantime – his Opus never got written.
- He is packing up his desk, leaving the school for the last time, with the memories of so many kids he'd taught.

Final scene: Former student, now Governor gives farewell address.

“You think you've wasted your life. Made no difference. Look around! (A full auditorium.) There is not one life here that you haven't touched.

Mr. Holland: We are your symphony! We are the melody and the notes of your Opus. We are the **music of your life!”**

POINT: His lasting contribution was in the people he influenced!

- He had sacrificed his own dream out of dedication to others.
- When all was said and done, he had written a symphony he had never dreamed of... in lives changed forever.

APPLY: That's what Paul is talking about as he closes his letter!

Here is a list of lives eternally changed – because of *his* sacrifice!

And now, the lives of others were being eternally influenced because of them. In fact, it is through their witness and ministry that we, ultimately, have come to know Christ.

And you & I are doing the same thing.

WE are writing our eternal symphony in the lives of those we are influencing toward Christ! We are making music in heaven!

- We may get tired & weary, & feel unappreciated by others.
- One day we will see the harvest - **Gal.6:9**; don't give up!
- Each will receive His praise from God!
- **The **credits** on God's production are still rolling!**
- What part in the production will we play?
- **The best is yet to come!**
- Die with your fork in your hand! It's almost time for dessert.