



Dr. Robert A. Cook

Phebe and I

(with other friends)

Question:
Who needs recognition...
instruction...
encouragement?
Answer



“Phebe and I (with other friends)”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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Let's construct a composite picture, putting together memories familiar to each of us.

We are at a wedding reception. Long white tables display beautiful gifts. The young bride, her face glowing, passes from item to item, admiring, expressing thanks.

Her fingers gently touch the monogrammed crystal, or the initialed linen, or the smooth shining surface of a hand-crafted table that bears, underneath its edge, the initials of bride and groom.

We admire all the gifts. But we go away thinking: The names add a distinctive personal touch. Perhaps Paul had similar thoughts about people's names. At any rate, in the portion that we call the last chapter of the Book of Romans he introduces us to several individuals whose histories and or characteristics have special meaning for believers of every generation, including our own.

We read: *"All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11).*

First, here is Phebe.

Not just Phebe standing alone, but Phebe and I ... Phebe and every other believer... each of us singled out for instruction and blessing in a particular way. Paul writes: *"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 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" (Rom. 16: 1, 2).*

What are some of the concepts these friends of long ago can share with us?

Warm Commendation Helps

I commend ... Phebe.

Don't be afraid to say a good word about somebody. Very often it will smooth the way for him or her.

Human nature is basically self-oriented. (You look for your own face first when you see a group picture, don't you?) At the same time, if we give attention to the matter, the blessed Spirit of God can enable us the better to measure up to Paul's dictum: *"Look not every man on his own*

things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4).

What are some practical applications of this truth?

If you know a family that is moving to another community, write a letter to a local pastor, telling him about these people—the children, their interests, etc. – and asking him to look out for them. Presumably, he will be glad to follow through. Before long there will be a knock at the newcomers' door and the pastor will be there to greet them. "John Doe wrote me about you," he will say, "and I've come to welcome you."

They have been commended.

Or let us suppose you are having coffee with another executive who is employed by a company different from yours. You know he has recently hired a young man from your church or school. You say, "Bill, I understand you have on your staff a young fellow I know well. He recently was graduated with honors from college. I'm so proud of him! I think he's a comer. Keep your eye on him, will you?"

You haven't told your friend, the executive, how to run his business. You have merely said a good word on behalf of a lad just starting his career.

Let's say that six months later your friend calls this young man into his office and says, "You know, I've had my eye on you ever since So - and so (that's you) said a good word about you. I'm pleased with your progress."

That boy has been commended, and made stronger. Often a small word of commendation will ease a burden or open a door of opportunity. Say that word. It will take only a moment! Write that letter - to the supervisor of the store, or the head of the library, to the manager of the bus line, to the "boss" of anyone who has befriended you. Say a good word for some one who deserves it. Don't hold back because you fear the result of such praise. God will take care of that!

People Need Each Other

Phebe our sister.

We believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not isolated human beings.

We are part of a close-knit fellowship. Currently we are singing the chorus:

I'm so glad I belong to the family of God,
Born of the Spirit, washed in His blood;
Joint heir with Jesus as I travel this sod;
I'm so glad I belong to the family of God.

Yes, we belong to each other. Paul points out that fact:

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ [that is, the body of Christ] ... Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Cor. 12: 12-20).

In the body of Christ each person has his separate and distinct function. Years ago when I was taking courses in Management, I read someone's opinion that every committee has in it one or more of these members: an initiator, and innovator, a proclaimer, an evaluator, an accountant, and somebody who is against everything!

...The initiator enthuses
...The innovator funnels in fresh ideas
...The proclaimer defames and sells the plan
...The evaluator analyzes the possibilities
...The accountant puts on the brakes: What will this cost?
When will it be paid for? Who does the paying?

You may have said in despair, "I don't know what I'm going to do with so - and - so on that committee!"

Don't fight him; use him!
Recognize that God has set different ones of us in the body, with unique functions and gifts, and

He wants to use them all.

I remember praying in a hotel room in Los Angeles. What I was really doing was complaining to God about certain people who were intensely critical of my work for Him. When I paused for breath the faithful Lord Jesus spoke to my heart: "Son, let those people alone. They're Mine and they're serving My purpose. I will take care of them. I use them as My gadflies."

I looked up the word.

Among other meanings a gadfly is "a person who annoys or stirs up from lethargy."

As soon as I accepted that verdict my heart was at rest regarding those dear brothers about whom I had complained so bitterly.

I came to see that it is not necessary that everybody (or anybody!) should approve of you or me, or that we should avoid criticism. What is necessary is that God Almighty shall fulfill His purposes in and through us. God has different kinds of people to do what He wants done at the time. Let them do it. Just be sure you (and I, too) are fitting into what God wants.

The Church Needs Servants

Phebe ... a servant of the church.

We have seen that “servant” and “deacon” are synonymous terms. You remember how the office of deacon came into being.

“In those days [the days of the early church] when the number of disciples were increasing, the Grecian Jews ... complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows [the Grecian ladies] were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1, NIV)

Here was a crisis to be dealt with. The apostles said in effect, “This won’t do.” So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, *“It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers ... choose seven men ... known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and [we] will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (vs. 2-4 NIV).*

You see, originally that was the meaning of the office of deacon. Phebe was that kind of servant. Paul said of her, “She has been a helper of many and of myself also.”

In the Local Church

I firmly believe the Bible teaches that God has something for every believer to do in the local church. That being the case, how can I become an effective servant in the church? Here is where common sense comes in as well as zeal.

While it is true that most of us, believers in Christ, possess more “gifts” with which we could serve Him than we are using, it is also true that in this matter of service in the church we must be honest about our fitness for particular tasks.

For example, if He has not given you a solo voice, don’t insist on “helping the church” by singing solos.

If you are not gifted in public speaking, don't expect to be the voice of the congregation.

If God has, however, endowed you with some skill-as, let us say, bookkeeping-then you should accept when you are nominated for treasurer or financial secretary, because that may very well be your ministry unto the Lord. It will involve work, yes, and few plaudits. But it is work that needs to be done, and God honors you with the assignment.

Perhaps you are gifted in mechanical matters. You can serve the church by helping to keep God's house in good shape. Preventive maintenance is an art as well as a skill and it can save hundreds of dollars of the Lord's money.

Did you know that some people have the gift of serving the church in intercessory prayer? I do not mean just praying in a perfunctory way, but really getting under burdens that relate to the church and "lifting" with blessed persistence.

You might take an hour each week to pray for your pastor. Pray all around him: for his study and preaching... for his calling and administration... for his family and children. By prayer, build a wall of protection around him against temptation. Pray for his acceptance by the people of the community and his encouragement that goes beyond routine sermonizing.

Pray for Sunday School teachers, for Board members, for individual leaders in the same depth and exactness.

In a Developing Ministry

Let me give you one more illustration of possible service for Christ and the church. Dr. Ted Place, a precious man of God, has a ministry of preaching and counseling and writing. He told me what happened to him as a high school student. He got down on his knees one day and said, "Jesus, I want to give You my life. But I don't have any abilities. I stammer. I get embarrassed when I'm asked to speak. I can't sing. The only thing I can do is gymnastics. So I'm going to give you that."

The following day he said to himself, "I'll go down to the park beside the river and do some tumbling."

He soon arrived at a place where there was a fine well-trimmed bit of grass and he started to do cartwheels and front somersaults and back somersaults and all the rest. When he paused, to his surprise he saw that he had an audience watching him. People seemed to have come from nowhere.

The Holy Spirit whispered to this boy's heart, "Tell them about Jesus."

Though at first he thought he couldn't, in a moment he was facing the crowd and explaining: "You're watching me do these tumbling tricks and gymnastic exercises. I want you to know that yesterday I gave my ability to do gymnastics to Jesus, my Saviour, and I want to recommend Him to each of you."

"That," Ted Place told me, "was the beginning of my ministry for Christ. I later learned to lead music. . . to speak in public. . . to study in seminary ... to direct overseas gospel teams. My first gift to God was gymnastics."

He became truly a servant of the church, as Phebe was.

We Must Accept Responsibility

Phebe. . . a succourer of many.

What does that mean? The Greek word means, in a general way, one who takes assigned responsibility in care for others, even to the expenditure of his or her own resources if need be. You receive innumerable calls for aid. Obviously you can't respond by giving to all of them. But the emphasis in our passage is on caring. Often the small bit of help, offered by some one with a truly tender heart-one who is ready for personal sacrifice if necessary - will mean more than a larger gift obtained through organized giving.

A succourer, then, is one who assumes responsibility for caring. If you are going to care, you must stop and think about the person involved and about his or her situation. You must take time to ask, "What is there about this person that I should be concerned about? He or she is burdened or unhappy; what can I do about that?"

Let your caring be sincere and unpublicized. People shy away from those who are officially helpful. Just very quietly think about the needs of others and allow God to enable you to do something about meeting them.

Paul says in Philippians 2, "Look not every man on his own things only, but every man also on the things of others ... Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Let me give you an illustration of effective burden bearing.

Concern for Others Good

Dawson Trotman, founder of that great soul-winning and life-building organization, the Navigators, used to write each day on his palms with India ink the initials of certain people for

whom he would be praying all that day.

Once when I dropped into his office I saw the letters "O.W." on his hand.

"I don't know any of your workers who has those initials, Daws," I said. "Who is O.W.?" He laughed and said, "That stands for 'Other Works' -people outside our organization who are working for God. As a matter of fact," he added, "we just finished praying for you when you came in."

I was to be remembered all day at the Throne of Grace! My burdens suddenly seemed lighter. All of us have opportunities for small, impulsive, generous actions. We ought not to stifle them. I had a letter from a person who had heard me say, "Obey that generous impulse," and shortly thereafter he had opportunity to do just that. It was a wintry day and he saw a little lady carrying a couple of bags of groceries.

He thought, "I'm in a hurry." But he brought his car around to where the woman was plodding through the snow. "May I help you?" he asked.

"Oh, bless you!" she replied. "I was just praying that God would send someone to help me." The dear aged lady was so grateful to be deposited at her own doorstep by somebody who, unknown to her, had obeyed a generous impulse. She did not know it, but she had just received aid from a true succourer - one who showed a caring heart and a willingness to lift a load.

Concern that Costs Something

One further word: The passage implies that Phebe's ministry involved her own personal resources. May I remind you gently that the index of how much help you are to somebody else is your willingness to give to that person from what you have at hand. You know the old saw about the two people who were talking about money. One said, "If you had a million dollars, would you give me half?"

"Yes, I would."

"If you had half a million, would you give me half of that?" "Certainly."

"If you had a hundred dollars, would you give me fifty?" "You know I would."

"If you had a dollar, would you give me fifty cents?" "Oh, come on now! You know I have a dollar!"

The worth of my giving is measured by what is in my pocket. . . or my bank account, ... or my tool shed, or whatever it may be. What I have right now!

There is a verse in Proverbs that speaks to this point. It says:
*“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.
[Insert here the little word “now.”] Say not unto thy neighbor, Go and come again, and tomorrow I will give...”* (Prov. 3:27, 28).

Phebe must have been a “right now” person. I ask myself: Am I like her in this?
Or do I procrastinate easily?

Is the oneness among believers more than an essential doctrine to me?

Is it an everyday reality?

Is my motivation confined largely to my own interests (“Me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more”?) Or do I yearn to see the whole church grow and prosper?

Do I care?

As we have contemplated these verses, probably each of us can say,
“We - Phebe and I - have walked together, learning some needed lessons.
Now we are joined by others whom Paul also commends.

Needed: People Who Work Together

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus.

The word “helpers” as it is used here has the force of “co-workers.” Paul is saying in effect,
“These two people really know how to work with others.

I wonder: Could that be said about me?

How does one go about becoming that kind of helper? The steps are not enumerated in the text but they can be easily identified.

First, the helper must establish good rapport with the one to be helped so that the two of them feel comfortable with each other. He must look for areas of his friend’s interests, pay attention to his achievements, and seek to know what challenges or burdens him.

This is a delicate process. Our tendency is to want to take over-because we know better than anyone else how to get the job done. Real helpers are not officious, not pushy. They give time to preliminaries. Before you can witness to your neighbor you have to help him pull the weeds in his garden, or repair his fence, or fix his lawn mower. People you want to help must come to feel at ease with you, not threatened. Sometimes a very small thing will lead to mutual acceptance. You don't have to know all about a person's work in order to show him that you appreciate what he is doing. I was invited to dinner at a friend's home and gave a quick look around, as anyone would do. It struck me that everything in that house was shining. So I turned to the hostess and said, "You've worked hard getting ready for this visit. Everything is shining and beautiful."

She seemed surprised that I had noticed. "Well, yes, Mr. Cook, I did work -but I wanted things to be nice when you came."

There was a sense of relaxation at that point; we understood each other.

It was easy to go on to talk of spiritual things.

Look for opportunities to lift a burden, to do a piece of work, to share a heartache. If you want to work successfully with people, encourage them. To do that you must be sure you have something of blessing yourself that will "spill over" into other people's lives. Our Lord Jesus said: *"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:38).

Make sure that you get something fresh from the Lord every day -something from His Word that thrills and excites you, something you can pass on to others.

Priscilla and Aquila had something to share with Appollos, the brilliant young preacher who, at the first, was not properly oriented to the gospel. What did these "helpers" do? *"They took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly"* (Acts 18:26). See how they worked: quietly, lovingly, thoroughly, in the warmth and privacy of their own home. Paul says they were "helpers in Christ Jesus."

Note another aspect of their helpfulness.

Willingness to Count the Cost

...Who for my life laid down their own necks.

In other words, they risked something for him. One of the points of index of usefulness among Christians is this: How much am I willing to let another person's need cost me?

The story of the Good Samaritan is a perfect illustration of this point. The priest passed by saying in effect, "I'm too busy." The Levite countered, "I can't be bothered."

But when the Samaritan, a traveling salesman, came where the poor wounded man was lying, he had compassion on him, bound up his wounds, set him on his own beast and took him to an inn where he cared for him during the night. In the morning, offering money to the innkeeper, he said, "Take care of him, and if you spend more than this, I will repay you."

What did it cost this evidently busy traveler to perform this act of mercy? It robbed him of a night's sleep. It made a pedestrian of him. It picked his pocket and put him in debt. How far am I willing to go in relation to another person's need?

Beyond Personal Interests

Of course all of us will usually respond immediately to the needs of our own family, our loved ones. This we should do. The problem is that our compassion doesn't spread quite far enough to reach the ones we regard as "ordinary people." The fact is, of course, that nobody is ordinary. Every human being is of immense value. So I must ask myself: How much am I willing to let another person's need cost me? That's an embarrassing question, isn't it? It gets right down to the quick, so to speak, underneath the calluses that we so often allow to grow over our sensibilities.

"Well, you can't go around helping everybody," you say. That may well be true. But up to the limit of what I am capable of, I ought to do what I can. Does that make sense?

Paul intimated that Priscilla and Aquila did this. Evidently at some time they were in positions of danger because of their friendship with the apostle. They had welcomed him, you remember, when all of them needed to work at their trade of tent-making. They had opened their home to believers and an infant church met there. We are not told what opposition may have followed. But somewhere along the line these two people must have said of Paul, "We don't care what it costs us, we're with him."

It may not be a life-or-death matter with us, but invariably true friendship will require that we take a stand as definite as that of Priscilla and Aquila, in relation to the one befriended. That person must know that we accept him, unconditionally. We may not agree with him in everything. We may deplore his faults. We may on occasion point out where he needs to change. Yet all the time that person must know that we accept him - we deeply love him - just as he is. All of this concept is wrapped up in the statement of Paul about his friends: "who for my life have laid down their own necks."

When you accept a person into your life and are concerned for him, you become vulnerable, don't you? It is practically certain that this relationship will cost you something-perhaps a great deal-in time and effort, in emotion, in influence, often in money or other forms of substance. The question is: How great a cost are you willing to meet, for Christ's sake?

"I Thank God"

Aquila and Priscilla had been helpful not only to the Apostle Paul but also to many others. I wonder: Who is thankful for me? for you? If that's a disturbing question, let it be. We can very well afford to give a good deal of serious thought to being the kind of person for whom others can thank God.

Paul said elsewhere, "I thank God upon every remembrance of you."

In other words, said he, every time I think about you I thank God for you!

How does one get into that special category of thanked - for Christians? If we want others to thank God for us, this is how we will operate.

We will be helpful without being officious or a threat to the one being helped ... We will be sympathetic without being maudlin ... We will express love without selfishness ... We will give aid and counsel without intruding upon the other person's mental and emotional privacy. We will seek to counsel, not to advise. A delicate line indeed! Very few people want advice. But many of us are deeply grateful for wise counsel. The one who counsels may not be particularly religious or pious - or even wise - but he demonstrates the genius of bringing the presence of God into the situation we are facing together. Oh, yes, you thank God for that kind of person!

So here we are, sharing with Paul his appreciation of fellow workers: Phebe ... Aquila ... Priscilla ... and now a man whose name is not well known.

Cherishing the "First Born"

Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

There is a special relationship between you and the one you win to Christ, particularly if he or she is the first in that locality where you have been ministering.

When Paul came into the area of Achaia and preached the gospel there, the first person to respond - Epaenetus - became especially precious to him, "my well beloved" Paul calls him.

If you will allow me to do so, I should like to sketch for you a scene from my own distant past that formed the background for me, of the same kind of response that the Apostle Paul must have had.

The city was Caracas, Venezuela, the occasion a great evangelistic World Congress in which several Venezuelan churches joined in a mighty soul-winning effort.

The daytime meetings were held in a large convention hotel and the attendance was encouraging. But it required a bold leap of faith to engage the largest amphitheater available, the bull ring accommodating many thousands of people. That's what we did. No one knew what to expect the first night.

There was beautiful music from an orchestra composed of gifted local talent. There was a message from the Word, and then, speaking through an interpreter, it was my assignment to give the invitation to accept Christ.

The choir was singing softly as I reviewed, thoroughly, yearningly, the steps by which one becomes a child of God. I waited. Everybody waited. In some panic I thought: What if nobody responds! What if we have contracted for the use of this immense structure, all to no purpose! Then from the far side of the arena I saw him: a tall man dressed in a neat business suit, erect, purposeful, coming to make his commitment to Jesus Christ. He was the firstfruits of my stumbling efforts. Although hundreds followed that night and on the succeeding eight nights, I shall always remember with profound thanks to God that man who was first to respond to God's call.

Let me ask you: Do you know the thrill of presenting the gospel to someone and seeing that person accept Christ as Savior?

Brother, there's nothing more exciting! But if you haven't had that experience don't feel guilty. It is not your work or mine that saves a soul. It is the Holy Spirit who effects the change.

But He works through us - when we let Him.

If you do remember the first one who came to Christ through your efforts, have you kept in touch with that person? Is his or her name on your lips and in your prayers as the name of Epaphroditus was familiar to Paul?

The Gift of Work

Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us.

Several women, each named "Mary" are mentioned in Scripture. We do not know which one is referred to here. This letter of Paul's was written to people in Rome, so she must have lived there at that time. Evidently she had come from some place else, because Paul had not yet reached Rome when he wrote this Epistle.

Who is this person? Is she the wife of a rich man, or some government official? Is she a servant? We are not told.

Of one thing we can be sure: She had a place in Paul's heart because of something she done - we do not know what - that he described as bestowing "much labor".

Some two thousand years later we find this lady we find this lady memorialized in the Word of God as being somebody who worked, who did not demand recognition, who ministered to the Lord and to His servants out of a heart of love.

She may have welcomed Paul's party into her house. She may have cooked meals for them. Perhaps she washed their clothes. She may have run errands for them or done any of the small things that no one else was willing to do. We do not know.

This is certain: what she did was done willingly; it was "bestowed." The verb "bestow" means to "give as a gift." Her work was performed in loving self-forgetfulness. Paul remembered - and God did, too!

Have you stopped to think that what you do today, my dear friend the ordinary, routine things that may not be religious in nature-are remembered by God? Being a Christian glorifies and dignifies all of life. There isn't anything that doesn't matter.

Offered Willingly

You are a busy mother, but today you're taking care of somebody else's children with your own, so their mother can keep an engagement to speak to young people about Christ. Perhaps it is work day at the church and you are using your skill as a carpenter or a roofer or a plumber or an electrician, to keep God's house in good repair. You think: "Boy, it's a great day. I could be out playing golf." Remember, brother, if this labor is "bestowed," if it is your love gift to the Lord and to His service, the record of it will last for eternity.

It is scarcely necessary to remind ourselves that our good deeds, however lofty our motive

in performing them, can never purchase salvation for us. It is "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). The world is full of people who "labor" feverishly for good causes but who, sadly, may hear God's final word, "I never knew you."

The "labor" God takes note of-as He remembered Mary's - is that which is done wholly in and for and by the living Christ.

If you have been to Calvary, if you acknowledge the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, you are in a position to "bestow" something of eternal value. Will you then, my precious friend, do something today for God and for His servants - something to be done willingly, lovingly, as a gift unto Him? Remember: God will take note!

I suppose when we get to Glory and meet this particular Mary (oh, she'll be there!) we may say, "We read about you in the Book of Romans. It said you bestowed much labor on Paul. What did you do?"

"Well," she may tell us, "it didn't amount to much. What is important about cooking a meal, or making a bed, or washing some laundry?"

If you are one of the rest of us who do a lot of things that don't seem to be appreciated, cheer up. God notices, and a book of remembrance, it is said, has been written before Him for those that love God and think upon His name.

Every gift "bestowed" is precious to Him.

Living on the Pacific Coast are two missionaries who spent over forty years in China. The husband has been Widely acclaimed as a true missionary statesman. For the past several years his body has been undergoing steady deterioration because of Parkinson's Disease. The wife is still in great demand as a Bible teacher and dynamic missionary speaker.

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But of her own choosing she has reduced her schedule drastically so that she can give every possible attention to her husband's increasing needs.

Some one asked her, "How can you do it! I mean, how can you give up your public life, even your social contacts, to take such meticulous care of your husband?"

The missionary wife replied, her face glowing. "Oh, I do this as unto the Lord." Oh, beloved, do something for Jesus today. Even though it is ordinary, or routine, or costly, or exhausting, He marks down the record of the love-gift "bestowed."

The Fellowship of Sharing

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

What makes you valuable to other Christians? In this verse there are four suggestions about Andronicus and Junia which, taken together, bring an answer to our question.

First, they belonged. In a particularly close and tender way they were, "kinsmen." I think the first noticeable thing that makes you valuable to other believers is the sense of belonging to each other. It is not what you do, not what you give, not the success of which you can be proud—these things do not endear you to fellow believers. All of them are by-products. For the kind of closeness the Apostle is talking about, people must feel that you belong to them, and they to you, in the bonds of Christian love. There must be a sense of being at ease with each other because you belong, both of you, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look again at these two men.

Second, they were involved. Paul calls them "my fellow-prisoners."

At some point, these people had been imprisoned, along with Paul, for their faith. We don't know when this happened, but it was an event never to be forgotten.

If you want to be valued as a Christian friend there must be a point at which you are willing to become involved in that person's needs, and burdens, and heartaches, and laughter and tears.

How do we accomplish this involvement in our everyday living? In all probability you and I won't go to jail together as Paul and Andronicus and Junia did. How do we develop this stance of deep caring? I think we must demonstrate to the other person that we really do care what happens to him.

About fifteen years ago I made a hospital call on a boy who had been rather hostile, especially toward me personally. He didn't have any use for me. I couldn't get even the time of day out of him. But I went to see him in the hospital.

He had been rushed there, his appendix had been removed, and now he was feeling miserable as one does under those circumstances.

Then, of all things, I show up!

I put my hand on his forehead and prayed briefly, asking God to be with him and to heal him.

When I said "Amen" he looked at me with an expression of utter amazement. "Gee, Doc," he said, "you do care about me, don't you?"

I had cared for him all along. But when I went out of my way to share his hour of pain and uncertainty, I became a different person in his eyes.

In this matter of involvement, by God's enablement find an area of need and go ahead and fill it. If it is to call on someone, make that call. If it is to help lift a burden, lift it. If it is to help pay a bill, pay it. If it is just to cry with somebody whose heart is breaking, go ahead and cry.

Find a way!

This procedure can't be learned from any textbook and no lecture of mine, or of anyone else, is going to give it to you. The Holy Spirit will have to guide you. And He will.

There is another suggestion these men give us.

Third, they worked. It is said of them " ... they are of note ... among the apostles." The only way to be noticed by the apostles was to be doing something. You can be sure that Andronicus and Junia had been working at something helpful in that church. Perhaps their grasp of Scrip-

ture was outstanding. Perhaps their teaching of the Word—such portions as were available—was unique. It may be their concern for other people was very great. For whatever reason, they were noticed by the apostles and that recognition was made a matter of record. The way to be noticed is to get to work.

Years ago there was a man who showed up at every business meeting of an organization with which I was connected. He would go around and talk to everybody he could reach, saying, “You know, I ought to be President.”

Sadly, he was never nominated, let alone elected. Why?

Because he never did anything. Your heart went out to him because he was so pathetically eager to be singled out for attention, but he never produced anything that was worth commendation.

Work is plentiful. In any church there is always something that needs doing. It may be just to dust the furniture or straighten the song books or welcome people at the door. It may be to call on a sick member, or give out bulletins or tracts. Get to work, for the Lord’s sake.

A final look at Andronicus and Junia reveals something else about them.

Fourth, they were respected. Paul said, “They were in Christ before me.” In other words, they were to be honored because they had been walking the Christian way even longer than the Apostle had been.

We cannot demand respect; we earn it. These people had earned the respect of the Apostle Paul. He saw them maturing in their Christian life and ministry. He saw them serving and helping others. He gave them the respect that kind of deportment earned. Oh, it is true that respect is not always forthcoming, but this is the ground out of which it must spring.

A New Start

Salute Apelles approved in Christ.

Apelles is one of the many persons mentioned by name in Romans 16. But we know nothing about him except that he was “approved in Christ.” What do those words mean?

They suggest, first of all, that there must be a story behind them, an explanation that we will not receive in its fullness until we get to the Gloryland.

Obviously there must have been a time when Apelles was not approved.

This would be true of him, as it is of all of us, while he was unsaved. Perhaps, even as a believer, he was a difficult person, to get on with, not readily accepted. Maybe he was an off-and-on-again person, one who could not be depended upon to follow through on anything. It is possible that he frequently got discouraged and quit. The summation of all these qualities, whether or not they applied to Apelles, would be: Not Approved.

But there must have come a point in the life of Apelles where the power of Christ and of the indwelling Holy Spirit began to produce a kind of character and work that was different, so unlike his old life that Paul was impelled to write of this man, "Salute Apelles approved in Christ." How does one qualify for that kind of tag? I would like to have that designation, wouldn't you?

Two Illustrations

Let's take an illustration from the world of business. On used car lots or in showrooms of individual dealerships one often sees an area marked "Approved cars." It means that a car found there is certified to be in good running order. It means you can depend on what the salesman tells you about it. This vehicle is not going to break down and leave you in the middle of nowhere. Moreover, the price is fair; the person who makes the sale will not gouge the buyer while enriching himself. All this is implied in the term "Approved cars."

Or take another illustration, this time from the field of education. I am in the education ministry at the college. Every two years we are required to submit our entire curricular program to the Education Department of the State of New York for what is called reregistration. The State officials reserve the right to look at our report and then to determine whether we are offering a curriculum that they can approve.

What constitutes approval in this connection? These are the tacit or direct questions we must answer: Are you offering what you say you offer in your catalog? .. Are the people who implement the offering of your curriculum well qualified and well trained and are they functioning in a way that will benefit the student and produce the results that you say you are producing? .. Are you teaching these curricular offerings in facilities adequate to the need?... Are your finances in good shape?

All of these queries and more are considered when a college is up for approval in terms of educational offerings. (I am glad to tell you that each time we have been visited we have reregistered and have also received a few complimentary remarks from those who made the appraisal. Apparently we are doing a good job, praise God.

We have been "approved."

What does it mean to be approved as a Christian? Preeminently you must be what you say you are ... Do you say you are a child of God through faith? In actuality, are you? .. Do you say you know God as your heavenly Father? Well, do you? .. Are you comfortable in the presence of God or do you flinch a little when someone says, "Let's pray?"

Are you living for Christ. . . witnessing for your Savior. . . giving of your substance to further His work? You say you are. If you want to be approved of God, you must be found doing the things you declare are characteristic of you.

Recipe for Divine Approval

There is another Scripture that uses the word "approved." It is 2 Timothy 2: 15, and it carries a formula for achieving divine approval:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Divine approval involves a new nature, a new work ethic, and a new commitment to the living Word of God.

Earlier in the chapter in writing to Timothy Paul stressed the need for a new nature. *"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1).*
"By grace are ye saved ..."

Next he identified Timothy as a workman and emphasized the importance of that role: *"Study-work hard-to show thyself approved unto God."*

Finally, he proclaimed the imperative of devotion to the whole Word of God: *"...rightly dividing the Word of truth."* Mark this: The person you are and the work you do will be determined by the impact of the Bible upon your mind.

These concepts, taken together, inevitably lead to divine approval of the one who walks in the light of them. Apelles must have been that kind of person. Whatever he was before, he was different now: He enjoyed divine acceptance.

Beloved, you can be changed, too: Trust implicitly in the One "who doeth wonders." Follow the steps outlined by Paul to young Timothy and yours will be a new enjoyment of a blessed relationship with your Lord.

“ ... and I”

In Romans 16, the chapter we have been considering, there are more than twenty persons mentioned by Paul by name about whom we have not had time to say anything.

Our purpose in talking about a few of these friends has been to identify ourselves with them in a practical way, positioning ourselves alongside each of them in a definite and personal learning situation. The “and I” of our study is important. here we are, learning:

Phebe AND I learning about “belonging”

Priscilla and Aquila AND I learning about committing

Epaenetus AND I learning about soul-winning

Andronicus and Junia AND I learning about cooperating

Apelles AND I learning about a new start

The Word reminds us that these men and women have been “*ensamples* [for us, and their stories have been] written for our admonition” (1 Cor. 10: 11).

Jesus, lovely Lord, help us to LEARN.

