



ROMANS Part 135

Chapter 16:1-2

Phoebe takes Romans to Rome.



Now I am commending to you Phoebe, our sister, being a servant also of the ecclesia in Cenchrea, 2 that you should be receiving her in the Lord worthily of the saints, and may stand by her in whatever matter she may

be needing you, for she became a patroness of many, as well as of myself.

Good old Phoebe. I love Phoebe and I can't wait to meet her in the resurrection—right after I meet Tryphena and Tryphosa, the hot Greek twins whom Paul is about to greet in this very chapter. (As for Christ, He will have to wait His turn; these women are the darlings of my heart, along with Lydia.)

In case you don't remember Phoebe, she is the woman who took the letter of Romans—the letter of Romans; the *only* letter of Romans—from the Corinthian seaport of Cenchrea to the saints in Rome.

I wrote about Phoebe in Volume 2, Issue 24 of the ZWTF. That was Part 7 of this series, which currently sits at number 135. The date was December 1, 2013. As so much time has passed, it is likely that several of you have never read my memorial to this great woman, and so I think it is only appropriate to reprint it here. Even for those who did read this four years ago, it deserves a revisit, especially as we are finally at that place in Romans where Paul mentions, by name, this great patroness of his and of the truth. I commend to you, then, the following excerpt from ZWTF Volume 2, Issue 24, also known as Romans, Part 7. (To see the entire issue, click the link below.)

TO BRING THE EVANGEL TO YOU ALSO WHO ARE IN ROME

Never forget that Romans is a letter written to real people. I used to think that the Roman ecclesia was a giant church. I now realize it was three dozen people meeting in Priscilla and Aquila's living room. They served coffee and dished up snacks. Everybody brought something to the meeting, as people do today. The Roman ecclesia was anti-establishment. It's the same today with true gatherings. Everything the establishment *was*, the Roman ecclesia *wasn't*. Big? Nope.

Recognized? Nope. Reputable? Nope. Certified? Nope. Crowded? Not unless Priscilla and Aquila occupied a single-bedroom dwelling. I don't know what their house looked like. None of the photos have survived. It may have been an apartment.

If I could crawl into a time machine and play with the dials, I would love to be standing outside this house when the letter arrived—*the* letter; the one and only copy of Romans on the face of the earth.

HISTORY OF *ROMANS*

Paul wrote the letter to the Romans from the city of Corinth on his third missionary journey. At the time, he was collecting money from the gentile believers for the starving Jerusalem ecclesias (Romans 15:25; Acts 24:17). This would mean that Paul wrote Romans around AD 56. I'm not sure what people were driving back then, but it wasn't Fords or Chevys. Neither do I know the most popular movie of that day, or how much a gallon of milk cost. All I know is that it was a long time ago, but not so long ago that it did not belong to our earth. This earth we now walk upon held and witnessed these events. Wander the ruins of ancient Corinth today, and at some point you will stride directly over the site of the home and the desk and the chair where Paul's scribe Tertius wrote furiously to keep pace with a pacing apostle.



Erastus Inscription

In 1929 this inscription was found mentioning Erastus as the one who paid for the paving of the street in return for his appointment as a city officer. It is likely that this is the same Erastus mentioned by Paul as sending greetings to the church at Rome (Rom 16:23). If so, Paul's influence apparently extended to wealthy and influential Roman citizens of Corinth.



Priscilla and Aquila
Rome, Italy. AD 55.

We know Paul wrote this letter from Corinth by the mention of three people: Phoebe (16:1), Gaius (16:23), and Erastus (16:23). Phoebe lived in Cenchrea, the main Corinthian port. Cenchrea was probably one of the unnamed churches “in the whole of Achaia” (2 Corinthians 1:1). It was a village within the greater Corinthian municipality. I'll get back to Phoebe in a second, because you're not going to believe what happened with Phoebe. I thought I loved Tryphena and Tryphosa (Romans 16:12), which I surely do (I am planning on greeting them first during the snatching away, I am not joking one bit, ask the Pilkingtons how much I talk about Tryphena and Tryphosa; I am going to hang with them for the eon), but Phoebe is now a new favorite. If there were early believer trading cards, I would trade you two Tituses for a Phoebe. Even three Tituses. You would have to pry Tryphena and Tryphosa from my dead fingers, so I won't fret the impossible possibility of losing their trading cards, because I've no plans to die.

Paul references Gaius in 1 Corinthians 1:14, so this man was decidedly a Corinthian. According to Paul in Romans 16:23, Erastus was “the administrator of the city.” I just discovered that, in Corinth, an inscription has been discovered referring to a certain “Erastus” as the official in charge of public works.

Wow, maybe the Bible is true after all.

All of this to prove that Paul wrote *Romans* from Corinth.

Back to Phoebe, one of my new favorites. Listen to what Paul said about her in Romans 16:1. She is the first person mentioned in this wonderful list of Paul's fellow-believers and fellow workers.

Now I am commending to you Phoebe, our sister, being a servant also of the ecclesia in Cenchrea, that you should be receiving her in the Lord worthily of the saints, and may stand by her in whatever matter she may be needing you, for she became a patroness of many, as well as of myself.

Good. God. Almighty. Paul selected Phoebe to take this letter—the letter—from Corinth to Rome. *Phoebe* did this; she carried it; she alone; for several hours, it was Phoebe and *Romans* on a boat together. One of two things happened. Either Paul arranged to meet her at the port in Cenchrea to hand her what he wrote, or he gave her the letter at one of the meetings, she took it home, left it on her dresser overnight, then tucked it away on her person the next day when booking passage to Rome.

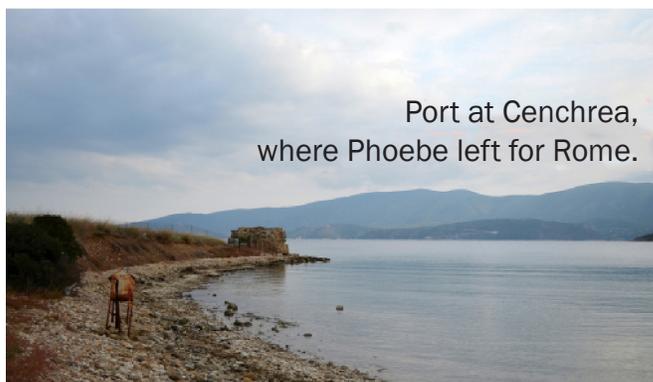
What an unimaginable honor. Not only was Phoebe a contemporary of Paul's, she believed his message. Not only did she believe his message, she helped Paul take it to the world by giving him money. This is the meaning of "patroness."

I know how this works. It is a beautiful, inspiring thing. Someone comes up to me after a meeting, or before I am about to leave their home. They touch my elbow to stop me, then look me in the eye. Something big is about to happen, and does. They extend their hand, and they hand me an envelope. They say, "I just want to do something to help." It may be five dollars, or it may be a check for 500 dollars. I don't look until later. It doesn't matter; the miracle is the same. The point is that this is how the Word goes forth. It is neither an altar call, nor a public, weeping, plea for money on my part. I make my needs known, yes, but subtly. The giving is just as subtle. The man or woman giving wants no fuss made, refusing all trumpet blasts. It is quiet, profound, necessary. The celestial world takes note; few others do. In one marvelous exchange, the work Paul began two thousand years ago trudges on.

This is the only way you and I have a Bible today, because people like Phoebe gave money to Paul. This is the only reason you and I know the truth of our celestial calling. It is because people like Phoebe stopped Paul, gently touched his elbow, and with tears handed him an envelope. She did this, not only for Paul, but for all the men of God heralding in that day. There were not many to care for. According to Clyde Pilkington, there were nine. Nine men on the face of the planet stood at the forefront of teaching. (It's no different today.) Phoebe financed them. So did Lydia (Acts 16:14-15). It was gentle, humble, pure as Mt. Ararat snow. It came from the heart, not compulsion. So did the gospel. Today, nothing has changed. The great

work continues in the shadows of doorways. If Phoebe were alive, she would be smiling. If Paul were alive, he would nudge her, point at us and say, "That's just what *we* did."

What is Phoebe's reward at the dais? I can't wait to see. The light will blind us. But our lovely Phoebe received recompense here on earth as well. For a few short days, between Cenchrea and Rome, she carried *it* in her personal possession. There was no safer person on the face of the planet than our dear Phoebe. All divine protection was hers. No doubt she carried it on her person, next to her heart. Should that original manuscript ever be located, it will bear upon it the human, feminine aura of a woman whose name is recorded for all time, yet unknown to most barbarians.

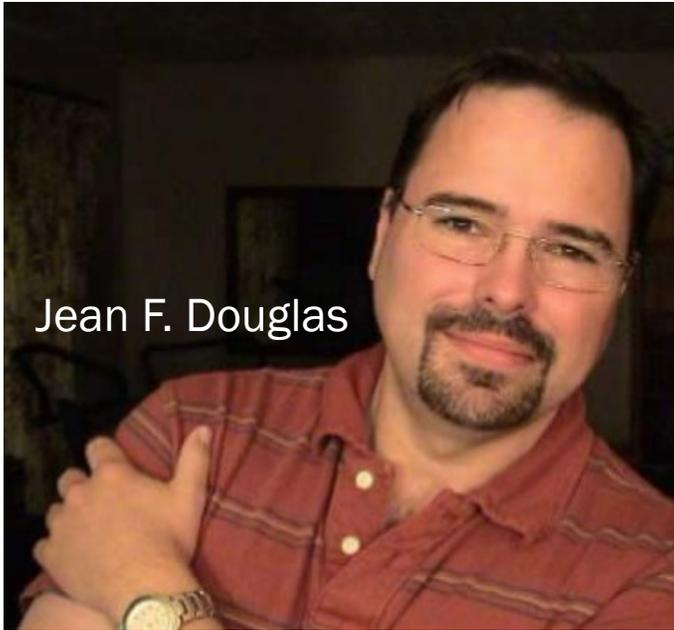


Dear fellow-believer Phoebe, I, and the saints of my household, salute you. We carry on the work. You did not labor in vain. Several *million* copies of the letter you carried to Rome, which sat on your dresser overnight, are enshrined in God's bound revelation to us. We study it every day. Few people understand it, but don't be discouraged. Some day, everyone will understand it. I am writing a series of newsletters about it now. You died not knowing any of this. You died having not received the promise of a glorified body. I shall see you in the resurrection. You will be radiant, Phoebe. You will rise first, then you and I will be with our Savior, together—forever. Then you shall be acknowledged before the universe, at the dais of Christ, as the patroness that you were, of God-sent truth, and the carrier, protector—and yes, the lover—of the most profound writing granted to humans. I can't wait to see this. I can't wait to see *you*.

I love you, Phoebe. And—dear Phoebe, I will see you in the morning. —MZ

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SEE NEXT PAGE FOR
JEAN DOUGLAS MEMORIAL



Jean F. Douglas

My good friend, fellow-believer and fellow-evangelist, Jean F. Douglas, died last week. He was only 47 years old. Apparently, he had a problem with alcohol. But he had no problem with God, and neither did God have a problem with Him. In fact, God liked him a lot. God had justified him, through Christ, and had chosen him from before the disruption of the world, not only to be holy and flawless in His sight, but to be a member of Christ's body. Thus, Jean's next conscious moment will be rising together with the living and the dead in Christ to meet his Lord and Savior in the air.

“SORRY ABOUT YOUR BRAVES”

I met Jean in the spring of 1995 at a conference in Centerville, OH. This was one of the earliest Concordant conferences I had ever attended. Jean called Gainesville, Georgia, his home; he was a true Southerner. He loved the Confederate flag and smoked Swisher Sweet cigars. Jean was a simple guy, a funny guy, and we hit it off immediately.

Jean was an Atlanta Falcons fan and had season tickets. He also liked the Braves. He used to have ongoing discussions about baseball with fellow believer Wallace Barnett, who was a Yankees guy. The Yankees would be winning and the Braves losing, and Barnett (of Richmond, Virginia) would say to Douglas (I can still hear his long, Virginia drawl), “Sorry about your *Braaaaaaves*, man.”

DO IT IN THE ROAD

Jean was a frequent guest at my home. We both loved the Beatles. One night in the late '90's, Jean was over to our Ohio farmhouse and my son Luke was sick upstairs. But Jean and I

decided that we needed to play the Beatles' “Why Don't We Do It In The Road”—from *The White Album*—on the old piano downstairs. If you have ever heard this song, you will know that it consists of Paul McCartney banging one chord on the piano and repeating the memorable lyrics, “Why don't we do it in the road; why don't we do it in the road; why don't we do it in the road; why don't we do it in the road; no one will be watching us; why don't we do it in the road...” and so forth. Jean and I banged on the piano like chimpanzees and sang this song at the top of our lungs. Luke yelled downstairs that we were making him sicker, and that we should “please, please stop!” The only reason that we didn't stop was because we could not hear Luke begging us, and neither could we hear him throwing up.

NEWPORT NEWS

I took many trips with Jean Douglas, but one of the most memorable was a trip to Newport News, VA, in November of 1996, to speak at a two-day conference at Robert Allen's church there. I was the only speaker at the conference; Jean came along for fellowship and company. It was an all-Black ecclesia, except for one white lady. We met in a converted dentist's office.

The second day of the meeting was November 9, 1996—the night of the first Holyfield-Tyson fight. Robert Allen invited Jean and me and about twenty of his friends over to his house to watch the fight. Jean and I were the only white guys in attendance. Let me tell you, this was one of the most memorable nights of our lives. Everybody except Jean and me was jumping up and down and yelling (screaming!) at the television screen for Holyfield to beat the crap out of Tyson. It didn't stop until the fight was over. Every punch and duck evoked an ear-piercing reaction. I've never heard such noise. Holyfield did beat Tyson—probably because of the commotion coming from Newport News. It was literally one of the best and most memorable nights of my life. I thank God that Jean was there to share it with me.

A GOOD MAN; A SOLDIER FOR THE TRUTH

Jean loved kids (he loved *my* kids, for darn sure); he took care of his mother, who is deaf, and his mentally challenged brother. He took great care of his niece. On the faith side, Jean F. Douglas faithfully served God, driving his old Cadillac thousands of miles, literally, to attend nearly every Concordant conference between 1995 and 2009 and record the speakers. He sometimes spoke himself, but most of the time he ran the recording equipment. Jean was content to play a supporting role in the body of Christ. He was so humble, so faithful, so true that way. He never tired of speaking of His great God and rarely heralded himself

I cannot wait to see Jean celebrated, heralded and awarded at the dais of Christ for his faithful service. May that day come soon. In the meantime, rest well, my dear brother. —MZ