



Family and Gospel Ministry
Romans 16:1-16

Main Idea: True disciples should welcome and care for each other as family while encouraging and recognizing one another's service to the Lord.

Welcome and care for true disciples as family in Christ (1-2).

- *True disciples are truly family (1a).*
- *True disciples are truly servants of the Lord (1b).*
- *True disciples are truly members of a local church (1b).*
- *True disciples truly welcome and care for other disciples in a way that honors the Lord (2).*

The Lord called his church into gospel ministry. The Lord stirred his church to give generously to support gospel ministry, and the Lord designed his church to be his family, welcoming, caring, and recognizing each other by their connection through their faith and service to the Lord! As Paul began the final section of his letter to the church in Rome, he started by asking them to receive and to welcome the person who was the primary carrier of this letter to Rome: A lady named Phoebe. The reason why they should welcome Phoebe was simple: She was family! The church in Rome hadn't met Phoebe, but Paul said that she was "our sister." She was a sister in Christ through her faith in Jesus Christ. This is a truth that must be important to the Lord as he often reminds us of the simple fact that true disciples are truly family. Phoebe was more than just family in Christ; she was also a servant of the Lord. Some translations say "deaconess," but this is not a good translation of the word in this context. The qualifications of a deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-12 state that a deacon should be a one woman man, also giving qualifications related to the behavior of the deacon's wife. The word for title deacon means "servant," and it's most often translated this way in Scripture (Matthew 20:26, 23:11; John 2:5, 12:26; 2 Corinthians 6:4; etc.), even used in connection to Jesus (Romans 15:8) and to Paul (1 Corinthians 3:5; Philippians 1:1). True disciples are truly servants of the Lord. True disciples are also truly members of a local church. Phoebe was a member of the church in Cenchreae, which was near Corinth, and she was also someone who was generous in supporting the mission of the church. She had been a patron to Paul and to others, which simply means that she had helped meet needs in order to support his work in the mission. Because of her generosity, Paul encouraged the church in Rome to care for her, meeting whatever needs she had as she carried this important letter to Rome on Paul's behalf. What a beautiful picture of God's call for his church to welcome and to care for true disciples as family in Christ!

1. Use the BlueLetterBible app to do a word study on "welcome" in verse 1. What is Paul calling the church to do in reference to this word? Why?
2. Use the BlueLetterBible app to do a word use study on the Greek word for "servant." Looking at the use of this Greek word in other verses in the New Testament, why is "servant" the most appropriate way to translate this word. How are all true believers servants of the Lord?
3. What does Paul's reference to the church in Cenchreae (as well as his reference to house churches in Rome in subsequent verses) reveal about God's expectation of membership in a local church? Why is church membership important based on this passage?



4. Take questions 1-3, and now apply them to your life. Are you a true believer? Do you see other true believers as family? How are you serving the Lord? Are you a committed member of a local church?
5. How do we continue to welcome and to care for true disciples who the Lord connects to our local church?

Greet true disciples not only as family but also as co-workers in Christ (3-16).

- *True disciples are family in Christ (5, 7-9, 13-14, 16).*
- *True disciples are co-workers in Christ (3-4, 6, 9-10, 12-13).*

After introducing Phoebe, Paul shifted his attention to greeting the few people in the church in Rome that he knew. For many of the individuals named in these verses, Romans 16 is the only information we have in Scripture related to them. While we don't know much about them, what we do know is clear and significant. Paul practiced what he preached. He had encouraged the church in Rome to view Phoebe as family and to care for her as such, and his greetings emphasized this very view of those he knew in Rome. True disciples are family in Christ, and Paul made this point over-and-over again as he went through the list of names in his greetings. They were "beloved," "kinsman," "mother," and "brothers" to the Apostle Paul, and Paul encouraged them to greet one another in a way that recognized this familial connection (a "holy kiss;" i.e. a non-romantic, but loving and familial greeting). Also, true disciples are co-workers in Christ. Mixed in equal proportion to his familial references, Paul recognized that his family were also co-workers in the work of Christ. They were "fellow prisoners" and "fellow workers" who were "chosen in the Lord" and "worked hard" in their service to Christ, being "approved in Christ." What an important reminder that when it comes to true disciples: We should greet them not only as family but also as co-workers in Christ!

1. Do you ever use familial terms when referring to one another in the church? Why did the early church do this – and God revealed this in his Word? What does it help us to see and to accept in terms of our relationships and responsibilities to each other in the church?
 - a. Commit for the next week to be more intentional about using familial terms to refer to one another, reminding yourself of the gift God's given us of being in his family through Christ!
2. Do you ever recognize and encourage each other by talking about your relationship as co-workers in the work of Christ? Why did the early church do this – and God revealed this in his Word? What does it help us to see and to reinforce in terms of our relationships and responsibilities as the church?
 - a. Take a few minutes in your group to recognize each other by the ways that we serve and work together in gospel ministry in the church?
 - b. Commit for the next week to be more intentional about referencing the work others do for the Lord.