

Sermon Notes

Romans 16:1-15 – “Greeting the Saints”
A Sermon Series on Romans (May 26, 2019)

Introduction

- 1) What section of Scripture are you the most willing to skip over in your private reading?
 - a) Probably for most people it is the list of names.
 - b) Usually associated with the OT, but here in Rom 16 we have a NT list.
 - c) Since we practice expository preaching (going through a whole book) in this church we will not exclude this section.
 - d) Besides, it is a rare insight into the humanity and fellowship of the ancient church, which can seem distant and theoretical sometime.
 - e) A little biography can be helpful once in a while.
 - f) Finally, it draws our attention, once again, to the critical thing: The Gospel.
- 2) A few things to note:
 - a) Remember, Rome is one of the few Gentile churches Paul hasn't founded or even visited.
 - i) Romans was meant as an introduction of himself to the church. Rom 1:7,15
 - ii) And as a blessing, being the most detailed description of the Gospel. Rom 1:16-17
 - b) When engaging in the “picklock of biographers” there will be much speculation.
 - i) Many of the people listed in Rom 16 are only mentioned in this chapter.
 - ii) There will be a lot of “maybes” and “possiblys” in today's sermon.
 - iii) Educated historical guesses are not the basis of doctrine, but it is helpful to get a sense of the humanity of the ancient church.
- 3) In Rom 16:1-15 Paul speaks about two groups:
 - a) Those who Paul commends that the Romans receive. Rom 16:1-2
 - b) Those in Rome Paul personally greets. Rom 16:3-15

Those to Receive – Phoebe

Rom 16:1-2

- 1) Paul commends only one person to the church in Rome, a woman named Phoebe (FEE bih).

*“I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea (SEN krih eye); that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.” – Rom 16:1-2*
- 2) She might have been a wealthy businesswoman.
 - a) She has been “a helper of many” including Paul.
 - i) Word for helper is “*prostátis*,” where we get our word “patron.”
 - ii) It implies someone who has the means to give support.
 - iii) And patronage was a very important part of ancient Roman society.
 - b) Also, the mere fact she can travel to Rome means she has some wealth.

3) She is a “*diákonon*”.

Rom 16:1

a) This is the female form of *diákonos*, which can mean (as found in the NASB):

- i) A “servant.”
Like a waiter or helper. Matt 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5,9; 12:26; Rom 15:8; 1Cor 3:5; 2Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:15,23; Col 1:7; Col 4:7
- ii) A “minister.”
A person who administers/manages something. Rom 13:4; Gal 2:17; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:23,25
- iii) The church office of “deacon.”
Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:8,12-13
 - Deacons, along with Elders, are the two regular offices all churches should have. Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:1-13
 - Elders govern and teach. Deacons support the Elders by dealing with the physical things of the church. Acts 6:1-6; 20:17-31; 1Pet 5:1-3

b) Considering the prominence Paul gives her, how “a servant/deacon of the church” reads like a title, the fact the Apostle asks that the church receive and help her, and that the Bible teaches there can be female deacons (1Tim 3:8-13), it seems likely she held the office of Deacon.

3) She might have been the bearer of the letter.

a) Some ancient manuscripts of Romans mention Phoebe as the one who delivered the letter in their subscriptions. (337, 424, 1881, Majority text)

b) She is from Cenchrea, which is a port city for Corinth.

Acts 18:18

- i) Paul probably wrote Romans in Corinth. Rom 15:25-27; 16:1,23; 1Cor 1:14; 16:1-4; 2Tim 4:20
- ii) It would make sense that a wealthy church officer from the port near where Paul was writing would deliver his letter.

Those Paul Greets

Rom 16:3-15

1) After Paul introduces and commends Phoebe, he then greets various members of the church in Rome.

2) The first group is **Priscilla** (*prih SIL uh*)¹ & **Aquila** (*A kwil uh* – eagle).

Rom 16:3-5a

a) They are a Jewish husband & wife missionary team.

b) They are one of the few people listed by Paul we know more about.

Acts 18:2,18,26; Rom 16:3; 1Cor 16:19; 2Tim 4:19

i) Paul speaks the longest about them in the list in Romans 16.

ii) Maybe because of their stature in the church and that they knew Paul.

c) Aquila was originally from Pontus (in Asia Minor), but lived in Rome with his wife Priscilla.

Acts 18:2-3

i) “Asia” in the Bible never refers to the orient (Japan, China, etc.).

It refers to the Roman province in what is modern day western Turkey.

ii) They had to leave Rome when Emperor Claudius ordered all the Jews out of the city.

iii) They moved to Corinth where Paul stayed with them when he arrived from Athens during his Second Missionary Journey.

iv) Like Paul, they were tent-makers.

¹ Luke calls her “Priscilla,” which is the diminutive form of “Prisca” used by Paul.

- d) When Paul left Corinth, Priscilla & Aquila traveled with him to Ephesus. Acts 18:18
- i) In Ephesus, a church met in their house. 1Cor 16:19
(Implying they had some wealth.)
- ii) There they instructed the powerful evangelist Apollos more thoroughly in the doctrines of Christ. Acts 18:24-26
- e) At some later time they returned to Rome, probably after Claudius's death in 54 AD. There, like in Ephesus, a church met in their house. Rom 16:3-5
- f) Things to note:
- i) Both are "fellow works in Christ Jesus."
- A phrase Paul frequently uses to describe those who labor in the ministry of the Gospel on some level.
 - See: Rom 16:9; 16:21; 1Cor 3:9; 2Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:3; Col 4:11; 1Thes 3:2; Philem 1,24
- ii) Both risked their lives (literally "necks") to save Paul's life. Rom 16:4
- iii) Thus they were known by "all the churches of the Gentiles." Rom 16:4
- iv) It is a bit odd that Priscilla is usually mentioned first.
- See: Acts 18:18,26; Rom 16:3; 2Tim 4:19 vs. 1Cor 16:19
 - Was her family of higher social status?
 - Was she the more prominent one in the labors for the Kingdom?
- 3) "**Epaenetus** (eh PEE nee tus - praiseworthy), *my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.*" Rom 16:5b
- a) Maybe Paul knew him personally, hence "my beloved."
- b) Maybe Epaenetus was converted through the labors of Priscilla and Aquila? (That is why he is listed right after them?)
- 4) "**Mary** (MAIR ee), *who has worked hard for you.*" Rom 16:6
- a) She was probably Jewish (Mary is a very common Jewish name.).
- b) She was known for her labors for the church.
- 5) "**Andronicus** (an droe NYE kus) and **Junias**, *my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*" Rom 16:7
- a) Both were most likely Jews, hence "my kinsmen."
- b) Though "Andronicus" is a Greek name, so he was probably a Hellenistic-Jew. (A Jew who accepted Greek culture on some level.)
- c) Junias is probably a woman, and thus most likely Andronicus's wife, and like her husband was a Hellenistic-Jew, since "Junia" is a very common Latin name.
- d) They, like Paul, had known what it was like to be imprisoned for the Gospel.
- e) They were "apostles," not in the narrow sense of the "Twelve" who had unique authority in the church, but in the more general sense of those who had been "sent out" by the church to do missionary work. Luke 6:13; 2Cor 8:3; Phil 2:25

- 6) "**Ampliatius** (am plih AY tus), *my beloved in the Lord.*" Rom 16:8
 a) Maybe Paul knew him personally, hence "my beloved."
 b) There is an "Ampliatius" referred to in the catacomb inscriptions in Rome.
- 7) "**Urbanus** (uhr BAIN us – refined, polite), *our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys* (STAY kis) *my beloved.*" Rom 16:9
- 8) "**Apelles** (a PELL ez), *the approved in Christ.*" Rom 16:10a
 a) Apelles is a rare name.
 b) Maybe he had faced a test of faith and remained faithful.
- 9) "*Those who are of the **household of Aristobulus** (a ris tow BUE lus – best adviser).*" Rom 16:10b
 a) Most likely slaves of a man named Aristobulus, who was probably not a believer.
 b) There was a famous Aristobulus, who was the brother of King Herod Agrippa I of Judea, who died in 48 or 49 AD.
- 10) "**Herodion** (hih ROE dee uhn), *my kinsman.*" Rom 16:11a
 a) Probably a Jew who was a freeman in the service of one of the Herods.
 b) Thus maybe tied with the household of Aristobulus?
- 11) "*Those of the **household of Narcissus** (narr SIS us), who are in the Lord.*" Rom 16:11b
 a) Slaves of a master named Narcissus.
 b) There was a famous Narcissus (Tiberius Claudius Narcissus), a freedman who served the Emperor Claudius, who committed suicide just before Paul wrote Romans.
- 12) "**Tryphaena** (trigh FEE nuh) and **Tryphosa** (trigh FOE suh), *workers in the Lord.*" Rom 16:12a
 Who may have been sisters.
- 13) "**Persis** (PUR sis) *the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.*" Rom 16:12b
- 14) "**Rufus** (ROO fuhs), *a choice man in the Lord, also **his mother** and mine.*" Rom 16:13
 a) Maybe the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Christ's cross part of the way to Golgotha. Mark 15:21
 b) "Rufus" is a common name, but "choice man" (literally "the elected on in the Lord") implies a special status. Though all true Christians are "elected" by the grace of God.
 c) Rufus' mother apparently aided and cared for Paul, like a mother, thus the "and mine."
- 15) "**Asyncritus** (a SIN cry tus – incomparable), **Phlegon** (FLEG ahn), **Hermes** (HUR meez), **Patrobas** (PAT ruh buhs), **Hermas** (HUR muhs) and *the brethren with them.*" Rom 16:14
 a) We know nothing of these men.
 b) Except they probably met in the same house church.
- 16) "**Philologus** (fih LAHL uh guhs – talkative) and **Julia** (JOOl yuh), **Nereus** (NEE roose) and *his sister, and Olympas* (oh LIMP us), and *all the saints who are with them.*" Rom 16:15
 a) Maybe Philologus and Julia are a married couple and Nereus is their son, and they also had a daughter.
 b) This family, and also some man named Olympas, who probably met in a house church.

Conclusion

- 1) What are we to make of this list of names in Romans 16?
- 2) First, and foremost, the importance of the Gospel, Paul's main purpose for writing the letter.
 - a) There is great diversity in this list (social status, income, race, age, gender, etc.) but they all have one thing in common: belief in, and support for, the Gospel.
 - b) Whether it is epic (being imprisoned for Christ, carrying Christ's cross, hand delivering the original copy of Romans), being a church officer (apostle, deacon, missionary), or something mundane (giving Paul chicken soup, like a mother), all are pleasing onto the Lord.
 - c) We as Christians must do the same.
 - i) At the very least, a Christian must attend worship on the Lord's Day, which is commanded by God, because it is where you hear and receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the thing which gives you rest and power.

	Ex 20:8; Rom 1:15-17; 1Cor 1:18,24 Heb 4:9-16; Heb 10:23-25
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 - ii) Christians must support the Ministry of the Word.
 - This is the preaching and giving (i.e. through the Sacraments) of the Gospel to the saints.
 - And for the outward proclamation of the Gospel to the world through missionaries and evangelists.
 - Not everyone is called to be an evangelist (pastors, elders, missionaries), but they should support this ministry through time, treasure and/or talent.
 - iii) Notice all the references to house churches in Romans 16?
 - They didn't have buildings for worship in the ancient church.
 - The faith was still new and was illegal.
 - As soon as it was allowed, however, Christians started to build churches for public worship.
 - The building is certainly not sacred, but a place that is opened up for all on the Lord's Day as a primary way to do local evangelism.
 - iv) The church should encourage, test and support those who are called to missions.
- 3) The fellowship in the church is both very radical and very conservative.
 - a) Note all the family language, that we are "brothers and sisters."
 - i) This is because we have all been made children of God through Christ.
 - We are all family, which is a very conservative thing.
 - And like family, we didn't choose each other, but are related by blood.
 - ii) This is all very radical.
 - Our fellowship with Christ's Church is more important than any other relationship (biological family, country, social groups, etc.)
 - Our status as brothers and sisters in Christ is the only social relationship that lasts for all eternity.
 - iii) Besides, devout Christians are salt and light, and bring blessing to any and all

other relationships.

b) Note the great diversity in the church. (rich, powerful, slaves, famous, the unknown, the old, the young, men, women, families, those who are single, different nationalities, etc.)

i) The church is very conservative in the sense that it is not leftwing-socialistic.

- Demanding a forced equality by ordering people to give up their rank and privilege.
- That would be based on greed and jealousy, instead of the Christian virtue of self-denial, which is to be practiced by all.

ii) The church is also very radical, because those things are secondary compared to the equality we have in salvation through Christ and that we are all brothers and sisters.

iii) In a modern Christian democracy we take this for granted, but for the ancients this is unheard of.

iv) The working out of the Gospel, however, created Western Civilization, the most prosperous and free society ever created.

- But that is a byproduct, never the goal.
- The goal is the proclamation of the Gospel!

c) Finally, note gender.

i) In one sense the Bible is very conservative about gender, correctly understanding men and women are different and have different roles, callings, and abilities.

- The Bible clearly teaches men should lead church.
- That is why the office of elder is reserved for men. 1Cor 14:34-35; 1Tim 2:9-15

ii) The Bible is also radical, clearly teaching there is no male or female with regards to salvation. Gal 3:27-29

- The (true) liberation of women happened in the Christian West.
- Saying a woman cannot be an elder doesn't mean they have no role or prominence in the church, as Paul clearly shows in Romans 16.

iii) As our culture increasingly runs after the destructive secular ideology of radical modern feminism let us resist, but always keeping the biblical balance.

- There is no contradiction between Rom 16 and 1Cor 14 / 1Tim 2.
- Let's affirm both and keep the balance.

4) Let us never lose the focus Paul wants us to constantly focus on: The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

a) *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."* – Gal 3:26-29

b) If your focus is on Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female, you're not listening.

c) Your focus should be on "in Christ Jesus."