

Paul, A Lover Of People
Romans 16:1-16
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Have you ever received a letter, an e-mail, or a text that seemed like whoever sent the message didn't want to stop? They just kept going on and on and on and on. For years, I remember I was really slow in doing e-mail. Believe it or not (pray for me), I don't type and I'm not very computer savvy, so I was still doing snail mail and calling people. So many of my friends would say, "John, you gotta get e-mail. I'd keep in touch with you if it wasn't for e-mail." "I've got a phone and you can call me or whatever. I just don't do that." Of course, I do that now, but sometimes I get e-mails...by the way, I always get "Dear, John" letters—I get them all the time. Sometimes people would just go on and on and on and on and on, and usually about half-way through, "Thank you, Pastor John, for reading this letter." I'm going, "Yeah, yeah. Okay, okay." It just keeps going on and on, and you feel like it's never going to end! Well, actually Paul the apostle does the same with the book of Romans.

Paul seemed to have a hard time saying good-bye. I want to point it out to you before we start Romans 16. If you back up to Romans 15:13 (we preached a whole sermon on Sunday morning a couple of weeks ago), Paul says, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." That's a closing benediction, and the epistle comes to its doctrinal conclusion at that point. Notice again in Romans 15:33, he says, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." So, it's like, "Okay, finally we wrap it up." You think, "You gave your benediction and it's all over," but he goes on speaking about his ministry and then closes Romans 15 "...the God of peace be with you all," he even says, "Amen." Then notice Romans 16:20. These are just a couple of examples. You get all the way down to Romans 16:20, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," and again he says, "Amen," but goes on for seven more verses.

Now, I don't say that complaining (I do when you send me long e-mails or letters), but I say that because Paul just had so much on his heart that he wanted to communicate. I mean this when I say, a lot of commentaries and preachers skip Romans 16. They pass right over it. I think that there is gold to be drawn from these verses that we miss if we simply skim over them. So, I'm glad that Paul, for one, kept going because in Romans 16, it may not look very interesting, but it is packed with many precious truths. It has been called by some, one of the most instructive chapters of the New Testament because it encourages personal relationships of love in the church.

I would say the overarching lesson and theme of Romans 16 is that God wants us to be a family. God wants us to develop friendships. God wants us to love one another and get to know one another. I always feel that some believers miss out so much when they are merely spectators at their church and not really participants. They don't get connected with other believers in a small group or get to know others and then maybe roll up their sleeves and serve

together, work together, and join arms together. Maybe you have a need and no one knows it because you have no friends in the church. I realize that it's not always your fault, but the Bible says he that has friends must show himself friendly. I believe that if we get aggressive and reach out to people, trying to connect with, serve, and get to know people, I actually believe that you have as many friends as you choose to have. Sometimes you get too busy for friends. Sometimes you don't want to bother with friends. Sometimes you've been hurt or you've been burned or they've stabbed you in the back, so you've pulled away, you build a wall, and it's to your detriment. We need to be open to reaching out to being involved and loving people, living with people, and engaged with other people.

I say that because that's what happens in Romans 16. Paul, this great theologian, this great evangelist and missionary, actually says "hi" to about 32 people—actually 33 people he names, and he specifically greets 24 people all in a city that Paul had never been to. Think about that. Paul had never been to Rome, and he says "hi" to 33 people and talks about 24 in this chapter that he had as friends. So, Paul was not only a winner of souls, he was a maker of friends.

It also says something else. It says that we cannot do ministry alone. All the years that I've been in the ministry, I could not have done what I have done, and I can't do what I'm doing without other supporters, without other helpers, without other believers. Not just people praying for me but working along with me. It's not a one-man show—you need me, I need you, and we need one another. The hand cannot say to the eye, "I have no need of thee." Every member of our physical body is important. You can't just say, "Oh, we don't need hands," or "We don't need feet," or "We don't need our eyes," or "We don't need our ears." Every member of our body is important, and we're interdependent upon one another. So, what a lesson to us. Think of the energy that it took Paul to keep in touch. Paul kept in touch. Paul was a friend maker. Paul had friends in the ministry, and though he was one of the greatest of intellects and a master of theology, he was also a people person and was committed to friends. No doubt, he remembered their names because he prayed for them as well. It's possible that he actually kept a prayer list and knew where people were, and he was praying for them by name.

A New Testament scholar by the name of Charles Erdman said, "These greetings reveal the heart of Paul showing his tender affection, his appreciation of kindness, his warm sympathy, and his high value of human friendships." I want to ask you a question. How much value do you place on friends? How important are friends to you? How much time and energy do you pour into friendships? I believe that if you do that, it will come back to bless you and to be a blessing in your own life. Paul commended and greeted them and expressed his love to them.

I want you to notice the references, (I still haven't started my text yet, I'll get there in just a moment) the number of times that Paul used the word "beloved." In verse 5 he used the word "beloved" in talking about his friends. In verse 8 he used the word "beloved." In verse 9 he used the word "beloved," and again in verse 12 he used the word "beloved." So, I've titled verses 1-16, Paul's loving heart. Next Wednesday night, we'll look at verses 17-20, Paul's protective heart. Paul loved people, and he wanted to protect people.

Let's begin reading in verse 1. Bear with me tonight, I think a lot of pastors don't read these verses because there are a lot of names that are really hard to pronounce. So, if I get some really difficult names, sometimes I'll just skip them—I'll let you go home and read them in your closet where no one is looking at you, and see how you do. It starts in Romans 16:1, he says, "I commend..." the only person that he commends was this first woman. Her name was Phebe, a beautiful name that means "radiant." He says, "...unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 2 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..." My King Jimmy says, "...succourer..." it means a helper, and I'll talk about that word in a moment, "...of many, and of myself also."

This Phebe is an interesting individual. It is believed that Phebe was the individual, (she's a woman) she was the person that actually carried the letter of Romans to the Roman believers. In those days they couldn't hit "send" on their smartphone and send an e-mail, a text, or a message. They didn't even have a mail system, only the official Roman government had a mail system that they would send mail, so it was very hard to keep in touch. Think about all these friends that Paul had, and they didn't have telephones, e-mails, Facebook...my heavens, what would you do without Facebook? There was no Instagram. There were no tweets that were going out, so how do you keep connected with all of your friends in this time? Paul wrote this letter, and it would be this woman named Phebe that would actually be the one who would carry and take it to the church and the believers there in Rome.

Paul says, "I want you to receive her in the Lord as become saints, and I want you to assist her in whatever business. Some think that Phebe was a woman of means, a businesswoman involved in business in Rome; she went to Rome on a business trip. Paul actually solicited her help in taking this letter to the Roman believers there. She has been a helper of many and of myself also.

We first have this commendation of this woman by the name of Phebe. It is commonly held that Phebe was the one entrusted with the responsible task of carrying the letter of Paul to the Romans. Never did a messenger carry a more important letter. I want you to think about this. What would you do if you were carrying Paul, the apostle's, letter to the Romans? It's like, "Uhhhhh, don't leave it in your donkey while you're having lunch in the restaurant because someone might break into your donkey and steal it. Don't leave it in the bathroom, you might forget it. Be careful." You'd be so careful. Think of all that God has done through the years as a result of this letter, and it's in the hands of this woman who is transporting it.

How many of you can't wait to get to heaven to meet Phebe? Every day you're probably saying, "The first person I'm going to look for is Phebe." Well, think about that—unknown to us but so known to God and so wonderfully used. When you get to heaven, look up Phebe, shake her hand, and tell her thank you that she didn't lose the letter on the way to Rome because it really was a blessing to be able to study the book of Romans. The simplest act of service became a blessing, not only to the Roman believers but to believers throughout church history, and many of the great revivals in church history have been the result of the study of the book of Romans.

The simplest duty and task and service—don't despise the day of small things. Don't despise what seems to be a menial task or menial service, "Oh, I told them I want to help out at church and they said they really need help in the cleaning ministry. All we do is vacuum, dust the pews, and straighten out the pew racks. I thought that maybe I could preach for Pastor John on Sunday morning. All they want me to do is vacuum." Never underestimate the value, benefit, and spiritual blessings that can result in just faithfully serving God, humbly doing what God has given you to do. There's going to be a lot of great saints, greatly rewarded in heaven, that were like Phebe, and all they did was just, "Don't drop it, don't drop it, don't drop it. Let's make sure we get it there," just carrying that letter safely to the believers in Rome.

There are three things that Paul says about Phebe in the text. I want you to see that. It says that she's our sister. What does that mean? It means that she was a woman, and so you ladies be encouraged. The first person on our list that God is using is a woman. Secondly, she's a sister. It indicates that she was a believer. She was part of the family of God. This whole thing just breathes warmth and love of the fellowship and family of God. She's a sister, so she was a part of the family of God. She's a believer. The second thing he calls her is a servant, notice it in verse 1. It's a unique word in the Greek. It's the Greek word *daikonos* where we get our word "deacon" from. Because she's a woman, it should be in the feminine which would be *deaconess*. Now, the debate that goes on among Bible students is whether or not she officially held an office of a *deaconess*. My response to that is very simple. There is no such office described in the Bible. There are deacons and there are elders, which are pastors, bishops, or overseers—all in the masculine. If a man desire the office of bishop he desires a good work and it describes an elder being the husband of one wife.

Does that mean women can't serve the Lord? By no means, as we are going to see. In this chapter, a large number of these individuals that Paul greets were women. He talks about how they labored in the Lord, they served the Lord, and what a blessing they were. He actually uses the feminine word *daikonos* where we get our word "deacon." The word "deacon" means "servant," by the way. It means one who is swift or moves quickly to serve the Lord. She was a *deaconess*.

Thirdly, Phebe was a helper. My King James Bible has "succourer" which means that she was an assistant or a helper. In the Greek it's actually *prostatis* where we get our word "patroness" from—again in the feminine. It was used of a female guardian, but it meant that she was one who took care of that which was entrusted to her. She was a faithful helper and servant. She was evidently a woman of means who used her wealth to support the church and the apostles. Ladies, be encouraged. God can use you in a great diversity of ways to serve the Lord. Jesus actually had women that traveled with Him and the apostles and assisted them. Granted, they probably cooked and fed them, prepared food and did other things, but they were there to assist, help, and to make His work light—to help Him in His ministry.

I thank God for the women in this church that serve the Lord. If you were to take the women out of this church who were serving the Lord, we would be in bad shape. We desperately need the women of this church. Not just to gather and to worship together, and by the way, did you

notice that tonight we gather and we don't separate men on one side and women on the other side, or we don't say, "Women, you stay in the foyer, only the men can come into the sanctuary." When the body of Christ gathers, and in the body of Christ standing before God, there's not male nor female, there is not Jew nor Gentile, there is not bond or Scythian—we are all one in Christ. These women were serving the Lord. Phebe was a leader in this ministry to the Lord, and Paul blesses and commends her. By the way, in those days Christians would travel around and connect with different churches and would bring letters of commendation because you couldn't get on the phone and call Paul saying, "There's this lady here, her name is Phebe, she says she knows you and has worked with you, and that we should let her serve the Lord here in our church. What do you think?" He would actually give her a letter of recommendation or commendation so they would know she's legit and can be involved in ministry there in their church.

In Romans 15:3-16, Paul gives his many greetings, and this is where some of the names get quite challenging, but there is still some important lessons for us to learn as we look at them. He says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila," again, the second person named is a woman. The first two are women. Priscilla and Aquila are the wife and husband that served the Lord together. I'll talk more about them in just a moment. "...my helpers in Christ..." by the way another repeated phrase in this section is "in Christ," "in the Lord," and "for the Lord," and they are serving Jesus Christ. Notice verse 4, referring to Priscilla and Aquila, "Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us. 7 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."

The second individuals that Paul greets is this husband and wife team, Priscilla and Aquila. Paul first encountered them on his missionary travels in the city of Corinth. They had come from Rome originally. Why did they first leave Rome? They first left because they were kicked out—persecution of the Jews. Claudius, the Roman emperor, had kicked out the Jews, so they left Rome and were in the city of Corinth. Now, Paul met them because Paul was a tentmaker. He went to make tents and wanted to work with his own hands, so he joined up with these two other tentmakers. They were a husband and wife team, Priscilla and Aquila. Now, when their named in the Bible (this is an interesting thing), Priscilla's name often appears first, which is interesting. Many feel that she might have been the person that was a little more spiritual or that she was more engaged in ministry than her own husband. We don't know, but it's interesting that her name appears before her husband.

Paul worked with Priscilla and Aquila, served with them, and later on they went to Ephesus and ministered there. They ran into this preacher named Apollos, who needed some instruction and some help, so Aquila and Priscilla brought him into their home and mentored, disciplined, and encouraged him. They are mentioned in several places throughout the Scripture. Not a lot is said about them, but they became companions of Paul, co-workers with Paul, helpers with Paul, but I want you to notice what Paul says about them here in this text. He says, "...my helpers in

Christ Jesus.” Paul could not do it alone. You and I cannot do it alone. We need our helpers to be able to work together, to serve together, and to minister together.

I want you to notice in verse 4, “Who have for my life laid down their own necks.” We have no idea what that specifically was. It is not recorded in the Bible, but somehow, somehow they risked their lives to protect or help Paul. Maybe they sheltered him in their home or something. We don’t know. It doesn’t say, but notice this commitment. When I say, “How much value do you place on friendships and working together with other people for the sake of Christ?” You cannot be a lone-ranger Christian. You need to be a friend maker teaming together with other people to serve the Lord. They actually risked their own lives to help Paul out. Paul goes on to say, “...unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Paul was giving thanks to God and to Priscilla and Aquila, and the other churches around were thankful for them as well. This friendship became a blessing.

Notice verse 5, “Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” In those days, they didn’t have church buildings. They met in their homes. The church is not a building—it’s where the believers gather and meet. They would gather together in their homes. Then Paul says, “Salute,” or say hi to “...my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia.” The “firstfruits of Achaia” means that this was the first convert in Achaia. Achaia was Asia or western Turkey. This person was one of the first converts of Paul. Then he says, “Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.” Here’s another woman, and Paul says that she labored. The word “labored” means she worked hard and toiled to the place of exhaustion. Then he says, “Salute Andronicus and Junia,” these were two women who were sisters. When I say sisters, I mean biological sisters that served the Lord together. So, we have a husband and wife and now we have sisters. He calls them “...my kinsmen,” which simply means they were fellow Jews, and they were also fellow prisoners “...who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” In other words, they were Christians before I was. These two sisters were also fellow prisoners. How’s that for a resume? “Yeah, I was in prison with Paul. We became prison buddies. We did time together.” You know, a lot of great men and women have been in prison, and one of them is Paul the apostle. He did time in prison. It doesn’t tell us why, but he was arrested quite often and thrown in prison and persecuted. He says, “Hey, we hung out in prison together. We were fellow prisoners together.”

Paul greets some other people with some crazy names in verses 8-10. I’ll let you read them. We don’t know anything about them, but we’re going to be meeting them in heaven. When someone comes up and goes, “Hi. I’m Aristobulus.” “Oh, yeah, Romans 16. You’re the guy that Pastor John wouldn’t read his name.” “Really.” They’re going to come up to me and say, “Why didn’t you read my name?” “Because you had a weird name, that’s why. If you have an easy name, I’ll read it.” Then, “Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. 12 Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.” You can dwell on these individuals, but what we know about them is that they served the Lord, they labored in the Lord, and even though Paul has never been to Rome he knows them and greets them.

My favorite is in verse 13. I can't wait to meet Rufus when I get to heaven. Who'd ever thought that's a Biblical name? "Hi, what's your name?" "Rufus." "That's in the Bible." Verse 13, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Interesting. Write this down, Mark 15:21. When Jesus was carrying His cross on His way to Calvary, remember He fell under the weight of the cross and they solicited a man by the name of Simon to help carry the cross. Well, Mark, and only Mark, (it's interesting because Mark wrote his gospel from the city of Rome) mentions that Simon was the father of two sons, one by the name of Alexander and the other by the name of, you guessed it, Rufus. Now, we don't know if it's the same Rufus, but they're the only Rufuses in the Bible. It's very possible that it's the same Rufus. If so, Simon became a Christian and perhaps his sons Alexander and Rufus became believers and leaders even here in the church of Rome.

"...chosen in the Lord..." now a real touching little note there in verse 13 about Rufus, "...his mother and mine." His mother and mine? What would Paul mean by that? This is so amazing. What Paul means is—his mother I adopted. She became my mom. Paul is actually saying Rufus' mom was amazing! She took care of me, so I said, "You're my mom. I'm going to become your adopted son," probably because she was an amazing cook and fed the boys, so they all wanted to hang out at Rufus' house. When they had free time, "Let's go to Rufus' house. His mom makes amazing enchiladas! Let's go over there and hang out." When he says, Greet Rufus, his mom, whose my mom too. It wasn't his biological mother, but perhaps she had a spiritual influence on him or took care of him. Notice the personal touch. This great man Paul, who could write about justification by faith, write about God's plan for Israel and all these deep theological truths about the sovereignty of God and the grace of God, he's not above saying, "Hi, Rufus. How you doing?" and "Say hi to your mom, my mother too." He kind of adopted her as his mother.

Jumping down to verse 16, "Salute one another..." you say, "Why are you skipping those verses?" Because those names are really hard to read, that's why I'm skipping them. You can read them, and we don't know anything about them. If we knew something about them I'd read them, but we don't. He says, "Salute one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you." We're going to stop there tonight, but I have some things I want to say about these verses that we have covered. Notice he salutes one another with a holy kiss. This was their mode of greeting in those days. Today, in certain parts of the world, they still greet by kissing on the cheek or kissing on both cheeks. We may greet with a handshake or we may greet with a hug, but we are to be warm in our expression to one another. We are to greet one another in the body of Christ and in the fellowship of the church.

I have some lessons I want to draw. First of all, though most of the names in this list are unknown to us, they are not unknown to God and are now in heaven enjoying their eternal reward. These are real people who are actually in heaven, and we're going to meet them some day. That's going to be amazing! Though we don't know them, they served the Lord in obscurity, but all the way through "who labored much in the Lord," "who served the Lord," "who served us," "who labored in the Lord." Do you know that you can serve the Lord your whole life through and get no recognition in this world, but God sees and God knows and God is going to

reward you. You may never be on a platform, you may never have your picture in a poster or a flyer as a guest speaker, you may never be on the radio, you may never be on television, you may never write a book, you may not stand on the stage and lead worship, and people may not know who you are, but if you are laboring faithfully, serving the Lord, you're going to be rewarded someday. Amen? That's what matters. Can you imagine, even Phebe, just carrying this letter to the Romans not realizing that one day we would be reading about her, she would be commended by Paul, and the affect that letter she was a participant in carrying would have upon the church?

The second point I would make is God uses people of all race, rank, and gender. If you go through this list, you find Jews and Gentiles, men and women, people of high rank and low esteem or low status. There are slaves mentioned in this list. Paul doesn't just write to the rich folk, to the wealthy and the famous, he actually says "hi" to people who were slaves. It shows you that in the church there is no racial distinction, no rank, and no gender distinction between the male and the female, and some people are married and some people are single. We get this idea that God uses married people more or God loves these people more or God uses this kind of person more. The body of Christ has great diversity, yet there is unity. I believe that our church should reflect that. When we gather in our church, we should have every age, every social status, and every race represented in this congregation—not one is more important than another. Paul greets every one of them. Four times he uses the phrase as well "in Christ," verses 3, 7, 9 and again in 10; five times he uses the phrase "in the Lord" in verses 8, 11 and twice in verse 12, and once again in verse 13. Their fellowship and their service was in the Lord. Then he used the word "sister" and "brother" in verses 1 and 14. He mentions two experiences which strengthened the Christian unity. He calls them "fellow workers," verses 3 and 9. They were busy serving the Lord. I think as Christians we should be working for the Lord and busy serving the Lord. They were called "fellow sufferers" in verses 4 and 7.

Three things I'll say to wrap this up. They are the ABCs of authentic affection in the body of Christ.

A - would represent "Accept" one another. We need to learn to accept one another. It doesn't matter who that other person is, they are a brother or sister in Christ. We need to love one another and accept each other.

B - Be a servant to others. Many of the people mentioned in this list were serving Paul, served with Paul. They were engaged in serving other people. If you're a Christian, who do you serve? Who are you blessing? Who are you serving? Who are you engaged in serving? Every Christian should be a servant to someone. You should say, "Lord, make me a servant, humble and meek. Help me to lift up those that are weak." Those are the words to a song, by the way. I won't sing it. You can be glad I won't sing it, but who are you serving? Accept one another, serve one another, and...

C - Cultivate love for one another.

Again, I realize that some of you are thinking, "I can't believe Pastor John is even reading these verses and talking about these verses." If for no other reason tonight, Paul was a friend maker. Paul made friends. Paul maintained friendships, and the friends that Paul made were in the Lord. They made friends around serving the Lord together. There is no greater bond than other brothers and sisters in Christ serving the Lord together; so join arms, lock arms with other people, and get busy serving the Lord together. Amen?