

Romans 16:1-16

“God Knows Your Name”

The book of Romans has definitely been an incredible journey. Filled with insight and understanding with regards to the heart of God, who He is, who we are before Him, there's just tons of revelation and illumination, theological principles and precepts. God's plan for the nation of Israel, what it has to do with us as Gentiles, how that God works all things together to those who love Him for our eternal good and His eternal glory. Righteousness, justification and sanctification on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work upon the cross; on and on we could go with respect to the radical realities of the book of Romans, we have doctrine and duty, how the principles are made practical.

But what's so great about Ch 16 is how it takes all of those things and brings us right back into the proper perspective of what ministry is really all about. Ch 16 reminds us that when it's all said and done principles and precepts *aren't* what it's all about. Oh don't get me wrong we need to know and be growing in those things, or else the Holy Spirit wouldn't have spent the last 15 Ch's seeking to expound and explain them to us. But when you get down to the brass tax as to why we need to know these things, what's the point in it all? What's the ministry all about, why study the various principles and precepts of the Word of God? So that we might know Him? Absolutely, but it doesn't stop there, it's not *just* about knowing Him, as much as God loves you and has given Himself *for* you, He doesn't want it to stop *with* you. He's got a plan and a purpose *for* you, something He wants to accomplish in and *through* you, and some how and in some way it will always lead *to* and be about the business *of*...people. The primary priority of the ministry is in A) Knowing Him, and in B) Making Him known. It's about people, “For God so loved *the world* (not this planet, the people in it) that He gave His only begotten Son.” The Son of Man didn't come to condemn the world, condemn people, but that the world, or people through Him might be saved.

Everywhere Jesus went He was reaching out *to* and being there *for* people. Even when He wanted a break He just couldn't keep Himself from ministering to the needs of the people. Remember when J.B. had been beheaded? Jesus heard about it, and just wanted to take His boys for a little retreat, He put them in a boat and they all headed out to a deserted place to be alone. and We read, “*But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.*” Matt 14:13-14 and He ministered all day long, the sun was going down, the disciples said, “Send them home, the journey is long and they've had nothing to eat.” So what did Jesus do? He said, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “In case you haven't noticed there are 10,000 people standing around here. All we have is a handful of loaves and a couple little fish.” Jesus said, “Bring them to Me.” He caused the people to sit down, and He blessed the meal, broke the meal, and fed every one of them to the full with plenty to spare.

That's such a beautiful picture because that's humanity, starving, hungering for something yet unable to meet the need in and of themselves. But on that day the disciples learned that there's no hunger in the heart of man that Jesus can't satisfy with plenty to spare. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."* John 6:35 Jesus was all about people, that was the whole point in His coming, He didn't come to this world for His health, He was despised and rejected by men, but He so loved us, He gave Himself for us.

Earlier in Matt's gospel we read of Jesus that, *"...when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" Matt 9:36-38* There's a need to reach people with the gospel, to let them know they don't have to die, the harvest is truly plentiful, but the laborers are few.

The apostle Paul was a laborer, he'd caught the vision, he told the Corinthians, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."* 1 Cor 15:10-11 But there's a beautiful blessing that takes place in the lives of those who labor in the Lord, they glean and gain incredible relationships, the best of friendships, there's just a bond there that's unlike any other.

Ch 16 of the book of Romans reveals to us some of those people that Paul had labored *with* and had become bonded *to* in the Lord. True ministry is one of the most difficult things to do on the planet, because with people invariably come problems, one day you're the answer to everyone's problems, the next day *you are* everyone's problem, there's incredibly high highs and devastatingly low lows. But there's nothing greater, and nothing more rewarding in this life than to give your life *to* the Lord, and be used in this life *by* the Lord to reach out *to* and be there *for* others. That's what Jesus taught when He said, *"...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* Matt 20:26-28 That's what the ministry is all about...others, the way up is down. One thing that caught my eye as I studied over this portion of scripture is the reoccurring theme of sacrifice and service of those whom God has chosen to record in the Chronicles of His Word here in Romans 16. That I'm aware of none of them were bible scholars, or had a masters in theology, we find in this list of people those who were rich, some poor, some free, some slaves, some male, some female, God puts no stock on gender, or the social status of man. If you avail yourself to God, He'll use your life.

The bible tells us, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* Gal 3:27-28 and That’s one of the things that are so cool about the body of Christ, we come from all different backgrounds, and walks of life, from various rungs on the social ladder, yet Christ is our common bond and we’re all 1 (equal) in Him. Well, let’s look into this list of some 26 people here that Paul mentions by name beginning in Vs 1.

Vs1-2

So the 1st person that Paul brings up by name is this woman by the name of Phoebe, and it seems to be unanimously agreed upon that she was the courier, the carrier of this letter to the Romans. So Paul is giving her a commendation, exhorting them to receive her, to assist her in whatever way she may have need of. and We find out 3 things about her in this brief little snippet of scripture. Paul says that she’s #1 Our Sister, #2 A Servant, # 3 A Support, or a helper of many.

So Paul refers to her in both a personal and practical way, on a personal level she’s a sister which speaks to our common salvation. When we give our heart to Christ the bible teaches that we’re given the Spirit of adoption, adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God. and So we have our family, and then we have our *family*. and If everyone in your family knows the Lord you get the best of both worlds, but if not often times people find themselves bonding closer to their family in the Lord than their own blood relation. It’s the Spirit of God, our common salvation, the blood of Jesus Christ that bonds us together. Remember when Jesus was teaching there in a particular home and there were scores of people just thronging Him, seeking to get glimpse or a healing touch from Him.

We read that in the midst of it all, *“...one said to Him, ‘Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.’ But He answered and said to the one who told Him, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.’”* and Matt 12:47-50 Now was He seeking to be disrespectful to His mother, or His brothers *physically*? No, but He was acknowledging a reality *spiritually*, that in Christ, we’re family. Paul says, “Receive Phoebe, she’s family.”

But not only is she a sister personally, she’s also a servant practically. So Paul speaks to her common salvation, and then to her consistent service. and I personally think this is really great because so often Paul is stereotyped as a male chauvinist who sought to suppress the female race. But the fact is that it was the Holy Spirit through *Paul* who did more to liberate women in the body of Christ more so than any other individual outside of Christ Himself.

Women were not seen as equals in that day, they were just a little bit more than property, just above a slave, or a child. and Yet it's the writings of Paul that acknowledges neither male nor female in the body of Christ, but that we're all one, co-laborers, co-equals, there may be different capacities we're called to function in, but not lesser or greater. Just like the body, if we were all eyes where would the hearing be? We all have specific roles that God has called us to individually and in that we come together to make up the body of Christ collectively. One of the most important documents of all the NT Paul entrusted to none other than a woman to be responsible for it, and ensure the safety *of* it. It was not an easy journey from Cenchrea (which was a seaport of Corinth from which Paul wrote this letter) to Rome. Rough sailing, rough terrain, often times dangerous, but Paul said, "Phoebe on your way to Rome I need *you* to carry this letter to them."

What's interesting is this word "servant" could be translated "deaconess." Speaking to the fact that early in the Christian church women were serving in certain capacities of leadership. Now in all honesty this word has both a broad and a specific application, it can speak of simply serving in general. Jesus used it when He spoke of being the greatest of all by becoming the *servant* of all, and when He said, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am there My *servant* will be also." But it also came to be used of positions of leadership in the body of Christ, Paul used it in 1st Tim when he was speaking of what it meant to serve as a Deacon in the body of Christ. and Quite frankly the only biblical forbiddance towards a woman in a capacity of service is that of usurping authority over a man which would speak to the role of a Pastor Teacher, an elder in the body, other than that it's wide open. and In that day congregations were segregated, men on one side, women on the other. Along with that the early church would use the mature women to minister in visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted in prison, mentoring and assisting the younger women, and even baptizing other women. But the point is that Paul saw the validity, and essential need for women's ministry in the body of Christ. and Women serve to make up a significant aspect of what gets done in the body, often times there's more women that serve in a fellowship than men (Which I think speaks poorly of the men, but that's the fact). Women made up considerable portion of those who ministered to Christ while *He* was on the earth, Jesus revealed Himself to a woman 1st after His resurrection. So Paul points out that Phoebe was family *in* Christ, and active in her service to the body *of* Christ. and Finally that she was supportive to the work done *by* Christ through His body. "She has been a helper," that word "helper" points to a protecting, or even a providing for financially. She was apparently a woman of means, and Paul is saying she's supported the ministry in a major way in the lives of a lot of people, mine included. So Paul speaks to her common salvation, her consistent service, and her constant sacrifice.

She was always helping people, what an incredible testimony in even just a couple brief Vs. What would the record state of you, or state of me? “Brother?” “Yes, serves now and then, doesn’t support God’s work a whole lot...” Or like Phoebe would the record state your salvation, your consistent service, and your constant sacrifice? Not out of guilt or obligation, but simply the practical realities that are spilling over out of a life of inward devotion and consecration. Paul says, “Receive her, and assist her in whatever business she has need of.” We’re not sure if maybe she was going to Rome on business or what, but whatever her need was, in the Lord they were exhorted to help her, because she’s been tons of help to others.

The idea there is that of sowing and reaping. We often view sowing and reaping with a negative connotation, sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. and That’s true, but it can also be an incredibly positive thing, I’ve always said that when it comes to sowing to the flesh everyone likes sowing those seeds, but nobody likes harvest time. But when it comes to sowing to the Spirit, it’s often difficult, takes a degree of discipline to consistently sow those seeds, but *everybody* likes that harvest. Phoebe has been sowing support to the body of Christ, now the body of Christ will be there to support her. and It’s a simple truism, that to the degree you give, you’ll be given back. Jesus said it like this, “*Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*” Luke 6:37-38 Paul told the Corinthians, “*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*” 2 Cor 9:6 So if you’re reaping a sparse harvest concerning the things of the Spirit, perhaps that’s an indicator that you’re sowing sparingly. Phoebe took care of the body, now the body was going to take care of her.

Vs3-5

Meaning that he was the 1st guy whom Paul led to Christ in that area, but perhaps you’re familiar with those names there in Vs 3, Priscilla and Aquila, the husband and wife team that became such an incredible asset to the ministry of Paul the apostle. We find them in Acts 18, mentioned again in 1st Cor 16 as well as 2nd Tim Ch 4, and we see them greeted again here. and There story is sort of interesting in that they were ordered out of Rome originally due to a wave of Anti-Semitism whereby Caesar ordered the evacuation of all the Jews. and They met Paul in Corinth where he was ministering and they were tentmakers like Paul by trade. and So they set up shop together and wound up ministering alongside one another. and When Paul left Corinth they went with him making their way with him ultimately to Ephesus, now it’s not known how exactly they risked their lives to save his but while in Ephesus a riot broke out because so many people were coming to Christ that the local silversmith was losing money on his sale of idols.

True to form Paul wanted to go into the amphitheatre and address the crowd, but the disciples stopped him because they knew that he’d be torn to pieces, and it’s possible that it was

during that time that they stood in the gap for him, and laid their lives on the line on behalf of him. Paul is right when he says that not only is he thankful, but we are too! We as Gentiles are indebted to Priscilla and Aquila for not letting Paul put himself into a situation whereby he'd have been killed.

Time forbids us from really investigating them but as we see now they're back in Rome, have a home fellowship. They were just a married couple in love with Jesus and God used them in an incredible way. But it's neat to see the providential hand of God in people's lives and it's especially exciting when we see it in our own.

Here they were, persecuted out of Rome from the human perspective, but sent out from the Divine perspective because God wanted to use them to in some way save Paul's life. While they were in Ephesus they met Apollos one of the most eloquent articulators of the Word of God in that day if not ever and they grabbed hold of him, taught him more accurately concerning the things he'd been sharing and then in time after Claudius died, they moved back to Rome to plant another home fellowship there. All they knew is they needed to get out of Rome lest they be killed, but in hindsight God had a radical plan for them. How often we worry about situations, and circumstances over which we have no control, but in due time as we look back we see God's hand moving all the while. They probably didn't want to leave Rome initially, but in so doing they were used to spare the apostle Paul's life and further disciple one of the most articulate communicators of the Word of God that ever lived.

But what a powerful testimony, a marriage with Jesus in the middle of it, when I say, "Priscilla and Aquila" we think good thoughts, when I say, "Ananias and Sapphira" it carries a whole different ring to it doesn't it? One marriage noted for genuine love for Jesus and bringing glory to God, the other for self-centered hypocrisy and seeking to exalt themselves. One about giving the other about getting, gaining, and greed. Think about it, which more accurately defines your marriage, Jesus in the center of it, or trying to look good to everyone else, but in reality defiled and corrupt? Priscilla and Aquila loved the Lord, set themselves apart to the Lord and God used them powerfully, in unity.

Vs6-7

What does it mean to be "in Christ?" Well, amongst other things the bible teaches us that it means to be forgiven of all our sin, to be made white like snow before the throne of God. To be robed in the righteousness of Christ, made a new creation through Christ, it's to have a life that's fruitful, Christ is the great equalizer, there's no special status in Christ, in Christ the Spirit dwells in us, we're sanctified, redeemed, un-condemned. Some come sooner, some come later, (and sooner is better than later) but what's essential is that you be in Christ. You're never guaranteed tomorrow, but you have today, you have right now. and The only thing you'll ever regret in coming to Christ is that you didn't come sooner. Paul speaks highly of these guys (or perhaps another married couple here), says they were in Christ before he was, are respected among the apostles, again a great testimony.

Vs8-10

Only one thing I want to point out about Aristobulus and that is that Paul doesn't greet him, but only those who are of his household. and Because of that many believe that he wasn't a believer but that the rest of his family had come to Christ. and It's a sad fact but many are the Aristobulus' today, their wife comes to church, they send the kids to church, but they themselves don't want much to do with it. Well what's the deal Aristobulus? Why won't you come to Christ, the message of grace and peace goes out to your family from God Himself, but not to you because *you* won't give *your* heart to Christ. Maybe you come to church now and then to keep the peace at home, but God wants you to know true peace with Him, and peace with God comes only through Jesus Christ Maybe you live with an Aristobulus, or you know an Aristobulus, pray for him, God wants to save him, the offer of grace and peace is there for him, but only in Christ.

He speaks here of Apelles as being, "approved" which speaks of being tested and tried and found to be genuine. Apelles had been through the fire, through the ringer, and had been found to be the genuine article, the real deal.

God will allow those testing times to come into our lives, that He might prove out the genuineness of your faith. He allows those times of shaking to come into our lives that that which can't be shaken might remain. In heavy times of trial the counterfeit doesn't make it, the wood and chaff burn, while the gold is made more pure, it's been said that the same heat that melts the wax making it moldable in the master's hands is the same heat that hardens the clay. What makes the difference is the substance that enters the fire. Peter said, "*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*" 1 Peter 1:6-7 James put it like this, "*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*" James 1:12 In this life we're going to have tribulation, but God is able to take those things that the enemy means for evil, to destroy and use them to prove you, to try you, refine you, and make you more like Jesus. We've just got to learn to give Him His way, the difference between "Bitter" and "Better" is the "I" as long as we're apart of the equation, bitterness is eminent, once we're removed, we'll be made better.

Vs11-12

Tryphena, and Tryphosa whose names mean "Delicate" and "Dainty" were possibly sisters, maybe twins, but they were willing to roll their sleeves up and get down and dirty if the need be for the Lord, they labored in the Lord.

Vs13

Not Paul's literal mother, but he viewed her like a mom, and when he speaks of Rufus being "chosen" the idea isn't of election, that's everyone he greets. But rather it speaks of his

prominent place in the Christian community. and Since Mark wrote his gospel from Rome, many believe this is the same Rufus he mentions in his gospel, there wouldn't really be any other reason for bringing him up. But we find him mentioned there in Mark 15:21 whereby Jesus was carrying His cross to Calvary and He fell under the weight of it and we read that, "*Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.*" and Undoubtedly that made an eternal impact on him and his family and apparently it seems as though this Rufus was one of the particular sons in view who became a prominent Christian figure there in Rome.

Vs14-16

The kiss on the side of the cheek being a common custom, nothing erotic or carnal about it, it would be a handshake to you and me. One final thought I want you to see. Back in Vs 13 we see the sisters who labored, and the other lady Persis, who labored *much*. There *are* degrees and distinctions in honor amongst believers, to labor in the Lord is incredibly honorable, to labor much is even *more* honorable. Which takes us full circle to some of our initial thoughts, the way up in Christ is down, a position of prominence comes through genuine humility, sacrifice, and service. and It's not that we should desire position, but that we should desire to serve the Lord with all that we are, to labor much in the Lord, and God will honor that. Listen, God knows your name, man may not ever know your name or have a clue what you do, who cares. God knows exactly who you are and He remembers your works "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" 1 Cor 15:58

Prayer Points: God may we not be moved, but planted, and rooted deeply in You, persevering, abounding in the work that You've committed to our trust that You might be glorified and magnified in our lives. May we rejoice in our common salvation that makes us family, be consistent in our service, and constant in our sacrifice, not because we have to, but because we love You. I pray for the marriages here, may they be centered in You Jesus, thank You for the promise that our labor in You isn't in vain, help us to endure.

We spoke of what it means to be *in Christ* there are those here today that are in Christ before you, that's ok, the main thing is that you come to. Forgiveness is yours in Christ, a clean slate, righteousness, a fruitful and meaningful life, not an easy life, but an eternally rewarding life, sanctification, justification, and freedom from condemnation all await you in Christ. You say, "Well how do I make this transition, what do I have to do to be *in Christ*?" Simple, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for you, to pay for your sins, and that He rose again that 3rd day that you might stand justified by faith in Him.