

Roman 16:1-5a

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[0 : 00] Let's go ahead and take out your copy of God's Word. Turn to Romans chapter 16. While you're doing that, I really appreciate the musical talent in this church.

It's so nice that Wes and Liz can take off for a vacation and we have others that can fill in for them and that care about content driven music the way all of us have so come to love and appreciate. And I even appreciate sometimes when the songs get stripped down like that and you really have to think about the words that you're singing. What a blessing. So last week we continued our work through Romans and we began in chapter 16.

We kind of got this epilogue now. Paul's beginning to wind the letter down and we're beginning to have to really take a look at these texts because there's not explicit teaching any longer. His intention here in chapter 16 is not to say to the church at Rome anything overtly. He's not saying, now learn this thing. I want you to be sure you understand this thing.

But yet, it's included in our scriptures and it's inspired and there's much for us to glean from it. So we looked kind of in a broad way at verses 1 through 16 last week at all of the Christ-centered, love-saturated relationships that Paul had with the saints in Rome and we applied that to our own living together.

[1 : 19] And as I told you last week, I hoped and Lord willing would and I believe what he is pleased for us to do today, wanted to go back and look at chapter 16 verses 1 through 5a.

So we're going to look at these three characters that are at the very beginning of chapter 16. So let's read that together and then we'll pray. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you and we praise you for our great salvation that you have worked in our hearts and changed us from haters of God to lovers of God. Certainly a miraculous activity in our lives. And we thank you also for the guide and rule of scripture handed down to us through the spirit, through faithful writers, through much martyr's blood, through the faithful work of translators from the original language that we might hold it in our hands today.

And I pray that all of us this day count it as precious. Even these verses, this, this wind down, this epilogue, so to speak, to Paul's great doctrinal treatise to the church in Rome, that we might learn from it and glean from it, that we might peer into what it might have to say to each of our lives individually as well as corporately.

[3 : 00] And we pray this in Christ's precious and holy name. Amen. Amen. So, before we take a look at these three characters, let me just ask you for a moment to kind of try to put yourself in their shoes.

We don't know exactly when the letter to the Romans was written, but roughly between 55 and 57 AD. The first gospels had not yet been recorded at this point. We don't know if it's Matthew or Mark first, but around the year 60 AD is when they were penned.

So, just imagine being in this early church and what you have is probably one copy of the Old Testament scriptures. Right? Those first 39 books of our Holy Bible.

And then you have the teaching of the apostles that's being passed around by word of mouth. So, just consider that as you see the lives of these people. And yet, we have so much more.

We have the canonized scripture. We know now this is the inspired word of God handed down to us, which gives so much clearer explanation of the things in those first 39 books.

[4 : 04] But just imagine that as they're living these sacrificial lives, these great examples of lives lived to the glory of God, that they may have had scriptures like this in their minds.

Psalm 37, 28. For the Lord loves justice. He will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever. But the children of the wicked shall be cut off.

Or Isaiah chapter 1, verse 16 and 17. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil.

Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause. Or Amos 5, 24. But let justice roll down like waters.

And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. These things may have been working around in their minds as they begin to live in this way. But remember that where we've come through Romans, beginning in chapter 12, Paul has ceased talking doctrine.

[5 : 04] He's ceased saying, this is the gospel. And he's begun to say, in light of that, this is now how you should live. It should be the natural outflow.

It should be the obvious response to what Christ has worked in you. This, then, should be working out of you. So note, not only may they have had these things in their minds.

Here we have, as I'll present to you, Phoebe probably was spending time with Paul at this time.

He's teaching these things. They've got these scriptures. But more importantly, to have the Spirit of God abiding within them, moving them to work in these ways.

So let's look at those ways. Let's look at how it was that they lived their lives. And I hope that as we're doing this, you can kind of hold your life up to theirs. Not that you're necessarily called to do the exact things they were called to do.

But we are meant to live in this type of way. So let's look first at Phoebe. Now, it's likely that Phoebe was the one that was delivering Paul's letter to the Romans.

[6 : 07] We can't say for sure that that's the case. But there's enough evidence to assume that that is. And I'll give you three evidences of that. First, she's from the church at Kinccray. We can see that here, which is the east port of Corinth.

It's kind of a province of Corinth, so to speak. So she is where it was likely that Paul was wintering. He was there, and that's where they proposed that he actually wrote this letter. There's a good bit of evidence that says that.

So that's where she lived. She's the only one in the list who's commended to them. He's giving a forward example of who she is.

He's saying to them, accept her as one in Christ. So she's the only one that's commended. And there's also no suggestion that she is coming along after the letter.

He doesn't say, our sister Phoebe, who will be coming after you've read this letter, anticipate her. She's on her way. But it seems to actually be accompanying the letter itself. And additionally, she appears to be a woman of means.

[7 : 06] We see in the text that she's a patron to many, which had some financial implication to it. So it's also likely that she was able to make this journey. In fact, she may have regularly made this journey.

She may have been a businesswoman and traveled as she would go through Corinth to the western port and take a ship to Italy. She may have actually made this journey regularly. That may be why she's the one carrying the letter to the church at Rome.

So it's likely that. And I think it's safe. And most scholars agree with me, who's not a scholar, that that is what's happening in this case. So Paul, as he commends her to the church at Rome, he gives her three titles.

The first is sister, but more specifically, our sister. He doesn't just call her his sister, but he says that she is our sister. Meaning that she is one of the beloved.

She is a saint. She is part of the church. And he's certainly giving the theological reason there.

That's certainly part of it, right? In Matthew 12, 50, Jesus said, whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

[8 : 12] There's definitely a theological practicality there. That she is, in fact, one of us, is what he's saying. But there's also a much more immediately practical reason.

It was dangerous to travel in these days. It wasn't a safe thing. And it wasn't a safe thing to be in a city that you didn't know. And therefore, he was looking for them to accept her and welcome her in as part of the family.

To provide for her needs, just as she had been providing for his needs. To openly, armed, welcome her. We talked last week about verse 16, where he says, greet one another with a holy kiss.

And I shared with you that that was a common practice amongst families back in these days. That they would kiss, both on greeting and on departure. And the church had taken on the practice, and

they called it a holy kiss, because they were a family in Christ, to say to people who were being disowned by their families, who were being completely cast out from everything that they knew, you're one of us.

Welcome to our family, right? You belong here. And this is the same thing that he's getting at as he says that Phoebe is our sister. Also recognize that that has other implications, right?

[9 : 25] As she is traveling to a strange place, more than likely as a single woman, able to travel in this way. She has no family holding her down in Corinth. 1 Timothy 5, 1-2.

Paul instructs Timothy, Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father. Younger men as brothers. Older women as mothers. Younger women as sisters. In all purity. So recognize that what Paul here is saying to Timothy is that watch how you function with the women in the church, because they're your sisters.

Recognize what he's saying, young men. He's saying it would be incestual to do anything with these young women until they are your wife. So he's also practically saying, treat her with purity. As you welcome her into your homes, watch yourself. Secondly, calls her a servant. The term here, the Greek is diakonos.

[10 : 32] A diakonos of the church at Kincre. A deacon. It's where we get that word from. A deacon of the church at Kincre. This text is one of the primary places that we pull our belief, the Christ Family Church, that it is acceptable for women to serve in that role in the church.

Now this morning I don't have time to completely unfold and unwrap that for you, but I just want to give you some brief. As I say that, I don't want to leave you there and have you go, well, I don't know. Let me give you some brief explanation to that point.

I am adamantly against a church having female deacons when the role of deacon is not clearly defined and it's actually not a biblical role. Many churches have deacons that are really elders, or maybe we could say quasi-elders.

They do some of the things that scriptural elders are meant to do. So hear me clearly. In many churches here in the southeast, I would say, oh, not in your church a woman shouldn't be a deacon. But in ours, because we properly define the role of deacon, I believe it's entirely acceptable. So take, for example, 1 Timothy 3, 8-13.

[11 : 44] We see verse 12, a little bit maybe troubling language for you, says that a deacon should be a husband of one wife. But I don't believe that that necessarily implies that a deacon must be married.

But that if they are a male and married, that they ought to have only one wife, and they ought not be a womanizer. Otherwise, we would say then that no single man could ever serve in the church, be given the task to serve in the church.

You back up to verse 11, and probably most of our translations, I think most of you are using ESV, will say their wives likewise. This is more properly rendered, women likewise.

Those of you who are holding out with your NASVs out there, for good reason, right? It says women likewise, and gives another case in point for how it is that we ought to conduct ourselves.

So those things in the church that are the practical serving, the carrying out, the physical service to the saints, we believe it's acceptable.

[12 : 49] And here we see Phoebe as an example of that. She's not the only one in the scriptures. We see many other examples of women called diakonos, right?

People want to call that deaconess, female deacon, whatever. It doesn't really matter, right? The noun itself is gender neutral, right? Diakonos, right?

So we stand in that. However, we have to carefully define. You start going around saying, our church has women deacons. You better explain what that means to people, right? It gives us all kinds of trouble.

But here she is as a servant of the church, and more than likely one who's been granted that position, who's actually been given that role in the church officially at King Cray. Thirdly, she is a patron.

It's an interesting word. And not just a patron, but a patron of many. And this was a term, this in fact is a feminine noun.

[13 : 45] So this would be a female guardian or protector. It was a very honored title. To bestow on somebody the title of patron in this time meant that you had a deep respect for what they were doing for you.

Paul himself says that she was a patron to him. A patron would have cared for the affairs of another and helped them with their resources. Served them in that way.

So it's very possible that Paul, being put up here in Corinth, that she was looking out for his good, his well-being. Looking out for his financial well-being. That she was providing for him.

That she was being sure that all those little things were cared for. However, I was reminded as I was looking at that, when Daniel Gentry and I traveled to Nicaragua here at the beginning of the year.

We stayed at a little bed and breakfast. They called it a hotel. It was kind of a bed and breakfast. And a sweet lady who owned it named Miss Dell. And a title of honor down there is to call somebody Mama.

[14:42] So we called her Mama Dell the whole time we were down there. And I would have given her this title. She really looked out for us. Every morning they served us food. They did those types of things. And she would ask, what are you guys planning on doing today?

And we would tell her. And she would give us the tips, right? Well, don't go here. Make sure you talk to this guy. Make sure you do this thing. She was the one that took us all over town and introduced us to all the pastors in town.

And make sure we were able to connect with them. She really looked out for us when we were there. When we were in her presence, we felt much safer than when we weren't, right? She really had our back in this way.

And she was influential. And she was looking out for our well-being in this regard. And so Phoebe was a patron. Not just to Paul. Not just of a couple of others.

But of many. We see then also a married couple. We see Prissa and Akilah. Now last week I misspoke.

[15:39] So I just want to clear that up for you. Last week I said we'll see Prissa's name other places as Priscilla. And I gave you the example of being kind of like William and Will. I was wrong, right?

Priscilla is actually the diminutive form of Prissa. It'd be like the more endearing version of her name. So maybe Will and Willie, right?

You would add that suffix on there to show that you had an extra endearing heart towards her. Kind of like my little Prissa, right?

Would be the way that would be read. But anytime you see those two, they're interchangeable. And that's the case with most Greek names at the time. Right? And Paul doesn't expressly give to this married couple specific titles.

But we can certainly gather a few from the text. As he explains who they are to him in Christ. Excuse me. Anybody else been sick from this pollen?

[16:39] So thankful for rain. So three titles for them as well. Firstly, they were movers. If you begin to actually take a look at Prissa and Achilla throughout the New Testament, they show up all over the place.

They were mobile. They moved. And it would seem that the great thing that we can gather from this is not that we should necessarily be movers. That we should pick up every couple of years and move someplace else.

But Prissa and Achilla, as a married couple, as workers, they were tent makers, probably had the temptation to put down roots. We are married. We should buy a house.

We should start a family. We should do these things. But they seem to hold very loosely to the things of this world. They seem to care very little about their own kingdom, but cared much about God's kingdom as he moved them around the region.

So let me just show you where they went, how this came about. In Acts 18.2, we see them for the first time. And Achilla is described as being a native of Pontius, who moved to Corinth from Rome when Claudius forced the Jews to leave.

[17:51] So already we have he's in Pontius, then he's in Rome, and then he's forced to move to Corinth. And this is where Paul first meets them. In Acts 18.18 and 19, Paul takes them to Ephesus and leaves them there.

Right? They reason with Apollos in Acts 18.26. Some of the correction that was brought to Apollos was brought by way of Prissa and Achilla. All right? So here we have them going from Pontius to Rome to Corinth.

Now they're in Ephesus. But here we find them once again being greeted in Paul's letter to the Romans. So it appears that they then moved back to Rome for a period of time once again. But we also see evidence in 2 Timothy 4.19 that they've returned to Ephesus. Right? So catch this. Married couple. They go from Pontius to Rome to Corinth to Ephesus, back to Rome, and then back to Ephesus again.

They were movers. They recognized that they were sojourning in this world. They didn't have to put down deep roots. They knew that they had a greater kingdom that they were headed to.

[18:56] A further very cool note is even though they were movers this way, even though they probably knew, established a pattern in their life that they would be temporary, you could just see Prissa getting to a town and thinking, I'm not hanging anything on these walls because you're just going to have me pack it up again.

Right? After they met Paul, they always had a church in their home. You can find record of that. If you're trying to work it out in their time in Ephesus, you can find it in 1 Corinthians 16.19.

They had churches that met in their homes. So they went to a place, they established themselves, and they allowed a church to meet. Maybe even started that very church in their home.

Right? They didn't say, well, we're just here for a time, college students. This is an in-between time. Four years is a long, five, six maybe years is a long time.

Right? And you're up here nine months out of the year. Right? You live here. Right? Establish yourself. Begin working out your salvation here in this place.

[20:05] Secondly, there were workers. Right? Paul calls them fellow workers in Christ Jesus. So we're not talking here about their physical work. We're talking about the spiritual work that they did.

They got busy. They were active in this way. Right? They were not vocational missionaries. In fact, we see in Acts chapter 18 verse 3 that they were tent makers like Paul.

Paul stayed with them for a while. Worked with them for a while because they carried out the same trade. Right? Right? So they recognized as they were called in Christ that they were also called to make disciples of Christ.

And as they went, as they bought from town to town, they had churches that met and they ministered to people. They were workers in Christ. Achilla didn't say, I'm not a worker in Christ. I'm a tent maker. Praise Jesus. He saved my soul. But I've got tents to make. I don't have time for the kingdom. He wasn't about his kingdom. He made tents so he could put food on the table.

[21:03] Right? He spent the rest of his time feeding people from the word of God. There's an invasive term that's worked its way into our churches.

And I probably could spend a whole hour talking about this. So just in brief. It's this little term, feel called. I feel called too.

I'm feeling called too. It's worked its way into the Christian vernacular in a great degree. What does it mean to feel called?

How does it even feel when you're feel called? People ask me that question often as I pastor the church. I think typically because I'm, well, I am young, but also because I look so young.

I don't look nearly 33. Right? Right? So people say, when did you feel called to ministry? And I think they're actually waiting for me to say, well, there was this mountain. And I hiked to the top of the mountain.

[22:04] And a cloud descended. And God met with me in the midst of the cloud. And he said to me out of the cloud. Like, I think that's actually the kind of story that they're waiting for. Which isn't to say that those things can't happen.

But I don't think it's the way things typically happen. I actually backed into this. Right? I was just doing some preaching. And literally, if you can imagine me backing into it, and suddenly I stopped and went, I'm a pastor.

Right? Should I feel called to it? I don't. I love this. I desire to do it. I want to be here. There's nothing else I would rather do.

But I need to feel called. There's no finger writing on the wall for me. There's no burning bush. What does that even mean? If we look throughout the scriptures, that object of calling, that language is used in two ways.

We've all been called to be Christians. And we've all been called to be like Christ. Two things. If you want to put it differently, we've all been called to be disciples.

[23 : 10] Disciples. And we've all been called to make disciples. To be disciple-making disciples. That's the calling on all of our lives. It's going to work its way out in different ways, certainly.

Right? Not all of you are meant to stand at a podium and preach on a Sunday morning. And that's okay. Not all of you are meant to go overseas and spend your life vocationally ministering to people. That's okay. Right? Right? But you have to recognize that we are all called to ministry. We have to distinguish. I don't know maybe what the right term is. Maybe vocational ministry.

Meaning I earned my living ministering to people. Where others may not, like Pris and Akila, didn't earn their living ministering. But they recognize that they were ministers. They were fellow workers in Christ Jesus.

And that's what we need to be as a church. All of us need to be fellow workers in Christ Jesus. You see in Ephesians chapter 4, the specific gifts that are given to the church.

[24 : 11] Right? It's not all of the spiritual gifts. But the gifts that are shown to us, though, are the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the preachers and teachers. And those are specific gifts that are about the Word of God.

And why is it that they're given to the church? Right? They're given to the church for the building up of the saints for the work of ministry. Not as separate things. Not as gifts so that we can build up the saints and do the work of ministry.

But those gifts are given to the church to build up the saints for the work of ministry. You see that? We're all called together into this task. You're all ministers of the gospel of God.

And in that way, we're all meant to be workers. So they're movers. They're workers. And they were riskers. Right?

Paul said that they risked their necks for his sake. And oh, how I wish that we had the record of that story. We don't know. There's no record of it anywhere. At least not that I could find.

[25 : 09] Please correct me later if I'm wrong. But I looked. I looked and I looked and I looked. I wanted to know how was it that person Akilah risked their very lives for the sake of Paul. And the way his language implies here is that all of the Gentile churches were thankful for them.

Probably means that they saved Paul's life as they risked their own for his sake. Gosh, I wish we had that story. What a neat story that would be. Right? But they were riskers. Again, they recognized that this world was a place that they were passing through.

They were moving on to a greater thing. As a couple, they risked. Not Akilah headed off to go rescue Paul and Prissa sat at home just fretting and worrying about him.

Right? Right? They risked their necks together for his sake. What a precious couple. What a precious individual Phoebe is.

What great examples of how our lives ought to be oriented and changed. And at Christ Family Church, I hope that we can take a book, a page from their book.

[26 : 09] Right? That we can take a look at what their lives look like and compare our lives to theirs. And let us be found treating each other as brothers and sisters. Becoming servants to all and patrons to many.

Recognize that we are simply passing through this life. And that there is much work to be done. Some at very great risk. I pray that when Christ returns, he will find us faithful, serving in these ways.

Let's pray together.