

INI Hymns:  
Easter 6

**Romans 16:1-18**

Sermon 23-29  
5/14/23

*“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.*

*3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*

*5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*

*8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.*

*12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

*The churches of Christ greet you. 17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”*

### **Dear Fellow Redeemed,**

Paul’s letter to the Romans is a treasure trove of truths explaining the true gospel and our Christian life which flows from it. But chapter 16 is just a bunch of greetings to people we don’t know with names that we can’t pronounce. Why should we spend any time on that as a sermon text? Maybe we should be asking a different question. God says “ALL scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” 2 Tim. 3:16 So what does God want us to learn from this chapter?

First of all, it gives us a wonderful picture of the closeness and the unity among believers. Sharing the faith in Christ truly brings people together in a close bond even with people you haven’t met. There is a care and concern for one another as we live out our lives in this world.

All of these brotherly greetings are contrasted in the last two verses of our text with those who claim to follow Christ but who introduce teachings that are contrary to the doctrine we have learned from the Scriptures. We are not to greet them. Instead Paul commands us with an urgent plea to avoid them. Just because someone confesses faith in Christ doesn’t mean we can join hands with them in worship. If they teach anything contrary to the Word of God, Paul says they are not serving the Lord Christ, but their own bellies. We are in danger of being deceived by them and misled in the faith. God is showing His love for us here wanting to protect us from the real danger of all false

teaching.

There is something else noteworthy in these verses. Out of the 29 people that Paul commends and gives greetings to, 10 were women. Some have accused Paul of being a male chauvinist and hater of women, but this chapter clearly shows that Paul has a very high regard for believing women. He doesn't just "Say hi" some of the women he knew. He highly honors them for their invaluable service to the Lord. The only reason some call Paul a chauvinist is because they are not willing to accept what God says about women's roles in the church.

So today I would like to take a closer look at a few of these women and see just how important and influential they were in the early church. As we do, remember Paul is writing by inspiration. This is God's word, therefore these are some of

### **The Women Whom God Honors.**

#### **Phoebe**

The very first person mentioned by Paul is a woman named Phoebe. Paul calls her: "our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea." Cenchrea was a sea port near Corinth. That's where Paul was when he wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome. So when he calls her "OUR sister," he is referring to the whole congregation in Cenchrea who loved and respected her as a sister.

Paul also calls her a "servant" of that congregation. That is a very interesting designation. The Greek word is *diakonon* or a deacon. Some translations says that she is a deacon of the church in Cenchrea, which is a legitimate translation. Here is an example of how many false teachers use Scripture for their own ends to contradict Scripture. They say that since Paul calls her a deacon, it must be OK for women to hold leadership positions in the Church and teach in the public worship. Do you see the fallacy of their reasoning? The word Deacon simply means servant. It doesn't say anything about what type of service is given. Just because some deacons have held leadership roles and even taught in church doesn't mean every deacon does so. It is ridiculous to believe that because she is called a Deacon she must have served in a way that Paul himself says he does not allow. In 1 Tim. 2:12 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." Paul would not commend her for doing something that God forbids.

But she did serve the church in many valuable ways. Paul says, "Indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also." She served God as a deacon in the church by providing personal assistance to many individuals in need including Paul himself. The word translated "helper" indicates giving aid physically and/or financially. It is often translated "Patron." One Greek lexicon describes the word this way: It is someone who "*cares for the affairs of others and aids them with her resources.*" It sounds like she was an important business woman who supported Paul's ministry and the whole church in Cenchrea.

Because of all the help she had provided to others, Paul commends her to the believers in Rome and asks them to, "receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints." They should treat her with honor and respect as a believer. AND Paul asked them to "assist her in whatever business she has need of you." It sounds like she went to Rome on some business matter and Paul wants them to help her the way she has helped so many others; whether it was giving her a place to stay while she was there or provide some

meals or help her find where she needed to go. It could have been anything. God desires that we show our love for God by helping one another and supporting each other.

Since Paul was in Cenchrea, where she was an active, supporting member and she was traveling to Rome, it is believed by many that she was the one who carried this letter and delivered it to the churches in Rome. Her trip may even have been the reason Paul wrote this letter at this time. You see how God uses many different people and situations to carry out His will. God used her to provide us with this letter to the Romans, which is one of the most important doctrinal books of the New Testament. So remember Phoebe as a very influential woman whom Paul highly trusted and who was invaluable to him and to the ministry of the church. She ought to be a source of inspiration to believing women today and Paul would urge us all to honor such women and help them as they serve the church.

### **Prisca**

The very next person on Paul list of greetings is another very important woman. We learn about Priscilla in Acts 18. Isn't it interesting that Paul calls her by her nickname, Prisca which indicates a very close friendship.

She and her husband Aquila invited Paul to live with them when they were in Corinth. They were tent makers like Paul, so they also worked together. Paul calls them "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." They not only made tents together, but were partners in the gospel with Paul. Prisca and her husband Aquilla were very instrumental in several churches. They worked with Paul in starting the church in Corinth. They were in Ephesus when Apollos came to preach in the Synagogues. He was a dynamic preacher showing Jews from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, but he only knew about the baptism of John. So Priscilla and Aquila took him aside privately and "explained to him the way of God more accurately." Acts 18:26

Notice Paul mentions her first, before her husband Aquilla. He says, "Greet Prisca and Aquila." Priscilla may have been the more influential one. Priscilla was very knowledgeable in the Scriptures as many women are. But she did not teach in the public assembly, but she did use her knowledge to help mentor other believers and even young preachers in private. Now, apparently, they had moved back to Rome and so Paul asks the believers in Rome to give special greetings to them.

Paul tells us a little more about them. He says they "risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." We don't know any more details about that but apparently somewhere either in Greece or in Asia Minor they stood up to defend Paul. Back in Rome they again were heavily involved in developing a new congregation and opened their house to meet in. According to this chapter there were at least 3 or 4 different groups of believers who met in different homes spread out across the large city of Rome. Paul wanted them to communicate with each other as brothers in fellowship.

### **Junia**

Another woman who played an important and interesting roll in the church was Junia. Verse 7, "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." This was apparently another husband and wife team who came to faith before Paul did and worked hard in the building up of the church. They were "of note among the apostles" or were well known

to the Apostles. They probably worked together with the Apostles in the church in Jerusalem because that is where all the Apostles were in the early years. Now they had also moved to Rome and continued to serve the church in important ways.

### **Mother of Rufus**

There is one more woman I want to mention. Paul honors her in a very personal way without even mentioning her name. That is the Mother of Rufus. We read in verse 13, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother AND MINE.” This is a very interesting reference on several levels. Does the name Rufus ring and bells? We talked about him a little over a month ago in a Bible Study during Lent. Simon of Cyrene was the man who was compelled to carry Jesus’ cross. The Gospel of Mark tells us that he had two sons: Alexander and Rufus. They must have been known in the church for Mark to mention them by name. Was this the same Rufus Paul is greeting? There is no way to know for sure but it is likely. If so, his mother would be Simon of Syrene's wife. Whether this was Simon’s wife or not, it is noteworthy the way Paul mentioned her. He calls her, “His mother AND MINE.” Paul was so closely attached to her that she was like a mother to him. We don’t know the details but it is likely that she took Paul in on one of his mission journeys and she treated him like her own son. Paul gives her the highest honor by speaking of her fondly as his own mother. There is a multitude of love contained in those two simple words.

There are several other women who are mentioned by Paul. Verse 6, “Greet Mary, who labored much for us.” In verse 12 Paul says, “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord.” They sound like they might be sisters who served the Lord together and Paul honors them highly. The word Paul uses of both of them describes hard physical labor or toil. These women worked hard in every way they could to serve the Lord by serving Paul and their fellow believers.

And that is what we want to take away from this on Mother’s Day. All of these women, whether they had children or not, all used their motherly instinct to serve God in many ways. Some used their business to help further the church and support the ministry of the word. Some used their understanding of God’s word to strengthen and encourage other believers. Some took care of others whether they were traveling missionaries or fellow believers in need. Some opened up their homes for a place of worship. In short they served their fellow believers both physically and spiritually. You could say they were like mothers to the whole church. They all worked hard for the church just like a mother works tirelessly for her family. Just like a mother is driven by love for her family, they were all moved by love for their Savior who saved them from eternal suffering and gave them a place in the mansions of heaven.

These are the women whom God honored, and even though they were no one of any great importance in the world, they are still known to us and are inspiring us almost 2000 years later. Things haven’t changed. You women still use your God given talents and resources to serve the Lord in His church. In our day where women are demanding the right to preach and be leaders in the church contrary to God’s will, you all honor the Lord greatly by accepting His order in the church and serving Him in a multitude of ways that are truly pleasing to God. And we all honor you for it, and thank God for you and pray for His blessings upon each of you. Our congregation would not be the same without you. All praise be to God. Amen.