

Not Ashamed
(Week 38)
Romans 16:1-16
“People of The Romans Road”

Introduction

*...**How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.** **Romans 10:15b***

Lots of pastors will skip the **Sixteenth Chapter of Romans**, when they teach through the book. To do so, in my humble opinion, is to miss out on a very important truth of which every follower of Christ should be aware: God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. As Paul closes his letter to the church at Rome, he lists thirty-five separate names of people who are, in one way or another, involved in the church ministry there. These people, most of whom we have never heard of, were dear to the Apostle Paul. Many had served alongside of him during some of the most critical and difficult times in his life.

What many have dismissed as just a simple greeting from Paul, I see, as The Holy Spirit revealing these people to us for a reason. They weren't spectacular by any means, and the world, for the most part, has forgotten about them, but God hasn't. And one day, when we all are reunited at the resurrection, we will have fellowship with these wonderful saints of God, who have not only gone before us, but set before us a lasting example to follow.

Now, if we were to take every name on this list and expand upon them one at a time, it would take weeks to try and uncover the secrets of their contribution to the faith. And for many of the names on this list, it would be impossible for us to ever know their stories. However, the ones that we do know about are fascinating for us to rediscover.

The most powerful thing that strikes me about this list of the faithful is the diversity of it all. There are men and women, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, and yet, each are valuable, not only in Paul's eyes, but in the eyes of a Heavenly Father, Who made sure that they were listed here for posterity. God uses people from all walks of life. While others may judge by one's status or lineage, God looks upon the heart. And to Him, all are valuable, as well as, equal.

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male of female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. **Galatians 3:28**

Paul begins by offering commendation to Phoebe, his emissary, who has been charged with delivering his letter personally. While there was a mail delivery service available in ancient times, it was slow, and rather unreliable. This is most likely the reason that Paul sent his letter to the church by way of a courier whom he could trust. Not only was the method more reliable and expedient, but it also offered a more personal touch.

When Paul wrote his now famous letter to the church at Rome, he was living in Corinth. After his mission was concluded there, his next stop was Jerusalem. As he prepared to leave, he dispatched Phoebe with his personal letter to Rome. He wanted to make sure that the church there showed her the love and respect that was due her. She was well thought of indeed. And what little we know about her speaks volumes about her life and testimony.

After Paul introduces Phoebe, he goes on to mention some of his closest allies in the faith. The two most prominent are Priscilla and Aquila, who were co-laborers with Paul for the sake of the gospel. We know substantially more about these two individuals, who were originally from Rome, and had now returned to help establish the church there.

The one thing that I would like for us to glean from this passage is that we all have been called by God to be His witnesses, and that the only thing that we need to be successful is to be willing to go, and to go in His strength alone. These faithful believers have led the way for us to follow. Let us examine the witness of Phoebe, Priscilla and Aquila, and all the others who were willing to take the **“Romans Road”** to go and make disciples.

Phoebe (vs. 1-2)

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. So you should welcome her in the LORD in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many — and of me also. **Romans 16:1-2**

Paul wrote this epistle while was living in Corinth and planting churches in that region. Phoebe, (pronounced fo-bay in the Greek) was living in Cenchreae which was a village in Corinth. We know very little about her, except that she was a great source of help to Paul in his ministry there. So much so, that as he prepared to go to Jerusalem, he entrusted her with the personal delivery of his message to Rome.

Phoebe, whose name means “*radiant*”, was named for a Greek goddess by her parents, which suggest that she comes from pagan ancestry. Many Christians, upon their conversion, would change their names, but for whatever reason, she did not. A possible explanation for this is that she was a successful business woman in Corinth, and her name was well known. It is more than likely that she was very wealthy, for Paul describes her as a benefactor of many, including himself.

The Greek that Paul uses that is translated “*benefactor*” carries with it the same meaning as we would term a “patron” today. When you hear someone speak of a wealthy person as a “patron of the arts”, this means that they use their vast wealth to promote artistic expression in its various forms (theatre, artists, ballet etc.). Phoebe, in like manner, was a “patron of the faith”, using her wealth to further the cause of Christ. It is because of her financial means, as well as, her heart for the Church, that she would have been both able and willing to travel to Rome at Paul’s request.

Another word that Paul uses to describe Phoebe is quite controversial in some religious circles. He called her a “*servant*”, which in and of itself stirs up little emotion. But in the Greek, the word that he uses is *Diakonos*. It is the same word that was used of the seven men ordained in the **Sixth Chapter of Acts**, when they were chosen to be “deacons” of the church. (I’ll bet I have your attention now!) So, you guessed it. Phoebe was a deaconess in the church at Corinth.

Now, before anyone storms out the door with your Baptist roots aflame, allow me to explain. *Diakonos* is NOT a title of authority. It is the same word that was used to describe a “server” in a restaurant. (The guy in charge of a restaurant is called “manager” by the way, and not server!) Deacons and Deaconesses in the early church were not in charge of anything except to serve the people. Can I just be honest with you? If it were not for our faithful women serving in the church, we wouldn’t be able to HAVE a church!

The word deacon now carries with it a perception of authority that it was never intended to possess. The title is misused, when it is employed in such a manner. I have several pastor friends who are subject to a “board of deacons”. Let me say it plain, this is NOT Biblical. A deacon has no authority over a pastor. Elders, not deacons, were intended to oversee the affairs of the church (Read **1 Timothy 3**). It is the elders, who are called “overseers” and not the deacons. Have you ever had someone who doesn’t know how to do your job, try to tell you how to do your job? Annoying isn’t it? The same thing applies to the ministry. Listen to the words of Paul in (of all places) Corinthians:

The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 1 Corinthians 14:32 NIV

What exactly does that mean? It means simply, that preachers are to be accountable to and corrected by, if necessary... other preachers. If you’re not a preacher, then how are you qualified to tell a preacher how to do his job? Answer: you aren’t. This is why the *Biblical* model for the church is to have the overseeing done by those who can preach. Read the qualifications of an elder in **1 Timothy 3**. They include, among many other things, “**must be able to teach**” (**1 Timothy 3:2**). I don’t believe that any pastor should have absolute authority in the church. I’ve personally witnessed that turn disastrous far too many times. Only Christ is the head of the Body. Pastors need to be held accountable. That is why every church should have a group of preachers in it, who will work with the pastor to assist him and correct him, when he needs it. This way, he not only answers to Christ, but to his fellow pastors. It is the way that God intended His Church to be supervised. But I digress.

Now back to Phoebe! She was the kind of person who was willing to drop everything in order to serve the kingdom. We desperately need more women like this in the Church! We need people who are willing to set aside the business of their daily lives and give of themselves in order to see others come to

know Christ. We need women who are willing to become disciple-makers. We don't know very much about Phoebe, except for the fact that The Holy Spirit thought enough of her faithfulness to include her name in the Scriptures for generations to come. That pretty much says it all, doesn't it? Want to be held in honor in the kingdom of heaven? Be a servant. Be radiant like Phoebe. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

Priscilla and Aquila (vs. 3-5a)

Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches. Greet also the church that meets in their home... ***Romans 16:3-5a***

Now these two we know a bit more about. They were husband and wife. Priscilla comes from the Latin word *Priska*, which means "ancient". Priscilla is the diminutive form of this word, which adds the meaning "little". Her name basically means, "little ancient one". Makes me wonder if she had wisdom beyond her years as a child. Aquila (yes, I know when you say their names together you feel like you're at the beginning of a Doctor Seuss book) is actually pronounced *ak-koo'-las* in the Greek, meaning "eagle".

This husband and wife ministry team were originally from Rome, but had to flee, when the Emperor Claudias expelled all the Jews from that city. Aquila was of Jewish descent, so the couple fled to Corinth. The couple were tentmakers by trade, which happened to be the same profession as Paul, so no doubt they had come to know him through their common occupation. Over time, they had developed a friendship with the Apostle, and he had led them to Christ. The bond between them became inseparable.

Sometime later, the trio had moved together to Ephesus, in furtherance of the gospel message. While Paul was off teaching, Priscilla and Aquila met a fiery young preacher named Apollos, who had been preaching repentance and baptism in the tradition of John the Baptist. The couple immediately took him aside and began to disciple him the way that Paul had done for them, equipping him with the knowledge that he needed to become a powerful preacher of the full gospel of Christ (***Acts 18:18-28***). We may never know just how many souls were saved thanks to this couple's willingness to get this young evangelist on the right track.

Following the death of Emperor Claudias, this missionary couple returned to Rome. And upon their return, started a church in their home. This was their life story, a couple of disciple-makers, who wanted all the world to know the Jesus they served. Is it any wonder that Paul thought so highly of these two precious saints of God? He wanted the people in Rome to know just what kind of faithful believers that these two were. They had been willing to risk their lives in order to help Paul spread the gospel. They stood with him shoulder to shoulder through some pretty rough times. Now, having been allowed to return to their home, they wanted to reach the lost, who were living there as well.

We need more people like Priscilla and Aquila in the church today; married couples, who are willing to share their lives to make disciples. In those days, there were no fancy church buildings that people could attend. Christians had to open up their homes and invite people to come in and enjoy the hospitality of those who wanted nothing from them, only to see them saved. These two missionaries worked as a team to rescue those who were perishing. And God wanted to make sure that their names were never forgotten. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

People of the Romans Road (vs. 5b-16)

Greet my dear friend Epaphroditus, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews and fellow prisoners. They are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles, and they were also in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet those who belong to the household of

Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have worked hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked very hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother — and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you greetings.

Paul goes on to mention several people that have become pillars in the church at Rome. Their names are all that we know of many of them, but God knows their story. Among the lists are the names of slaves and free citizens, women, Jews, and Gentiles. All who have been made one in Christ Jesus. All who have surrendered themselves as “living sacrifices, holy and acceptable”. Their very lives are lived in order to make disciples of Christ. I like to call them, “The People of The Romans Road”.

When we began this study of Romans, I promised you that at the end of it, I would help you to use this book as a witnessing tool to reach others for Christ. You too, have been chosen and set apart by God to be people of the Romans Road. You don't have to have an amazing pedigree to be a disciple maker for Christ, you simply have to present yourself as a living sacrifice. This list of people here is as diverse a group as one could imagine, and yet, all of them were used by The Holy Spirit to make a difference in this world. And as such, they will never be forgotten. They are the people of the Romans Road. Are you willing to do as they did and go out and make disciples? Then here are some verses from Romans that will help you to lead others to Christ. As you might have guessed, these verses are known as, “The Romans Road”

For a person to come to faith in Christ, they must first understand that they are, in fact, a lost sinner in need of forgiveness. You can begin the process of witnessing to them by showing them this verse:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **Romans 3:23**

The next step is to remind them of the penalty for all sin, as well as, the hope found in Christ Jesus:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ.
Romans 6:23

After this, show them the way this great hope for salvation was provided. Lead them to the cross of Christ:

But God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8

And then, you can tell them how to accept Christ as LORD and be saved:

If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is LORD,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **Romans 10:9**

Now, lead them in a prayer to accept Christ as LORD and ask for His forgiveness, and explain to them the assurance of salvation:

For everyone who calls upon the Name of The LORD will be saved. **Romans 10:13**

And there it is, The “Romans Road.” The very message of the gospel summed up in five short verses in *Romans*. People from all walks of life have not only accepted this message and received salvation, but those same regular people have shared it with others countless times, over and over again and watched multitudes of people become transformed into living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God! Are you willing to become one of The People of The Romans Road. Surrender your life to Christ, and then go and make disciples! You don't have to be amazing to make disciples, you just have to be available! All of us who believe have been commissioned to be... People of The Romans Road.

And let His faithful disciples say... TRUTH!!!