

Transformed into the Church of Christ

Spring Sermon Series on Romans

Romans 16:1-27

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

May 29, 2016

TEXT: Romans 16:1-27

This morning we conclude our spring series on Paul's letter to the Romans. We have been listening to Romans carefully this spring seeking to be transformed by the gospel. Romans, like any portion of God's Word, is God speaking to us. It is a remarkable thing that we serve a God

ROMANS

**"...PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE,
HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD,
WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP.
DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD,
BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND,
THAT BY TESTING YOU MAY DISCERN
WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, WHAT IS
GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT."
ROMANS 12:1-2 SERMON SERIES FEB 7 - MAY 29, 2016**

who is alive and who speaks to His people in the pages of Scripture. God does not leave us as He finds us, but is at work in the world through the gospel to remake us and re-create us into the image and likeness of His Beloved Son. We have been listening carefully, seeking how passage after passage is inviting us into this transformation. In the final chapter of Romans, chapter 16,

we discover that the gospel transforms us into the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of which we are a portion. The great Body of the Lord Jesus in the world is a mixture of peoples, and as we see at the end of Romans 16 when Paul looks at the church in Rome, we discover that his heart pours forth with a list of names of 27 ministry partners. We may be tempted to pass over this list and think to ourselves: "I don't know any of these people." For years, with the Men's Bible study on Tuesday, we had one man in the group that in particular seemed to loathe name lists, and as we read the Scripture out loud together, it seemed inevitably the name list would fall to him. It took two to three years, but eventually, after that third year, he realized that the names are important, the names matter. Your name matters so much to Almighty God that He has written your name down in the Lamb's Book of eternal Life. Our names matter. They matter, not just for record-keeping, but names matter because names reflect individuals as well as entire worlds that come together in the Church, the Body of Christ. We have looked at these last few chapters of Romans and have seen that Paul has been stirring the community to be this new community, this Body of Christ, this visible, functioning, renewed humanity in Jesus Christ, whose conduct in the world causes the world to take notice. We saw in the last two weeks in Romans 12 and 13 that we need to be gracious with one another on secondary topics to

preserve a vibrant unity that truly defines Christian faith and the Christian community.

So, we reach Romans 16 with this list of names, and I want to walk through this together. These names matter, and as we look at these names, remember that your name matters. Remember that the world that you represent matters as a full member of the Body of Christ. What does Paul do with this amazing letter? The first thing he does when he has completed it is that he entrusts it into the hands of a woman named Phoebe. In Romans 16:1, we discover that Romans will be delivered as there is no United States Postal Service in the first century. Correspondence is carried out through couriers of the Empire, but also through personal couriers, and we discover that the letter of Romans is given into the hands of a woman named Phoebe. Paul says that she is *our sister*. He also says that Phoebe has a role of leadership in the neighboring church at Cenchreae, which is the other side of Corinth. The ESV obscures this a little bit by translating it as *servant*, when what he actually calls her is a *deacon*. She is a deacon in the church, a leader in this neighboring church, and he has given Romans into her hands. She will carry it to the church in Rome. One of the most striking things about her name Phoebe—and this is not Phoebe the sister of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*—is that she is named after the Greek goddess who is the grandmother, if you will, in Greek mythology of Apollo and Artemis. She has a very pagan name. This woman has a pagan background, and she has come from a pagan background to serve as a deacon in this church, and she was entrusted with Paul's greatest letter. This is remarkable, and Paul says in Romans 16:2:

“. . . welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.”

Phoebe may have been a major supporter of the ministry in Corinth. She may, in fact, have been a wealthy woman who paid for the production and publication of Romans. We don't really know. What we do know is that this godly woman, who served in leadership of a neighboring church, was given this letter, and she is a woman who makes ministry happen. We don't know for sure, but she is probably the one to read Romans first, on its first hearing.

Next, Paul greets dear friends of his, Prisca and Aquila. We have met this ministry couple before. Prisca is known sometimes by the diminutive version of her name, Priscilla. Aquila, her husband, means *eagle*, and Prisca, or Priscilla, means *pristine*, so I like to think of this ministry couple as *Eagle* and *Pristine*. Every church needs an eagle and pristine, people who really make ministry happen. Kenwood is filled with couples like this, ministry-minded. Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. They become friends and serve together. Priscilla and Aquila end up teaching Apollos the way of Christ. They serve in Ephesus, and now Paul is greeting them as they continue their lifelong service to Jesus Christ in Rome. Notice that he then greets Epaenetus in verse five, and here's a story that I would love to hear some day. Epaenetus is

described as the first convert to Jesus Christ from Asia. Do you imagine that there is a story there? The very first Christian ever from Asia is a man with a Greek name, Epaphroditus, and Jesus Christ opens his heart to the gospel. So you have pagans, you have ministry-minded couples, and you have the very first convert in Asia whose conversion to Christ then compels him into Christ's service. In Romans 16:6, Paul says:

"Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you."

We have our first Jewish name of the group. We remember Miriam, the sister of Moses. The Greek form of this name is *Mary*. There are six Marys in the New Testament. It's a very popular name. This is not Mary, the mother of Jesus, but this is another Jewish woman named Mary. As Mary is described, Paul simply says that *she is a hard worker for you*. He greets Andronicus and Junia in verse seven, and they are identified as Paul's kinsman, so they are also Israelites, members of his ancestral community. Yet, he says not only are they his fellow kinsman, but they are his fellow prisoners. Paul spent a number of different periods of his life in prison. We know that he spent time in prison in Philippi; he spent two years in prison in Caesarea. We don't know which portion of his imprisonment he is referring to here, but at some point in his journeys, this ministry-minded couple also shared prison time with him. Isn't that great? You get close to people in prison, not just because you have to be close, but you have time to talk with people. The only prison time I've had was just about a 12 hour period when I was in a holding tank in Kazakhstan with my ministry partner at that time, Simon. We got close. We were close before, but we got closer during that time. We did what Paul and Silas did, we sang to the Lord, and praise God, He released us from that time. Paul is close to this couple, and he says about them in Romans 16:7:

"They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."

Paul has the humility to recognize that this couple was in Christ even before he was.

Look at Romans 16:8-9. He says:

"Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, . . ."

The names Ampliatus and Urbanus are Latin names, Roman names, but they are particular types of Roman names. They are the type of names that are well attested in primary sources in Rome, Pompeii, Spain, and other areas, and these were names that were given to freed slaves. Ampliatus means *Mr. Buff*. You think of the English word amplitude, getting big. This is the kind of guy that you want working for you, Mr. Buff. You also have Mr. Urbane. He may be urbane because of his gifts or his education. Often former slaves functioned as tutors in upper class families, but notice that Paul greets these men by name, men who represent a totally different socio-economic strata of the society. "And my beloved Stachys" is greeted as well. Literally this name means a head of grain or ear of corn. There is a whole world of flowers that are named

for this because their shape. His name is also the basis of the name Eustace, meaning *a good ripening flower*. In verse 10, he says: *“Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.”* A famous Greek painter has this name. He also says: *“Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.”* This is an extraordinary greeting, because we know the Aristobulus to whom he refers is none other than the grandson of Herod the Great. Aristobulus lived in Rome. Early sources tell us that he lived as a private person, and it seems that according to Romans 16, one of Herod the Great's descendants has become a believer in Jesus Christ. Aren't you glad that his name is in this list? Paul says: *“Greet the family of Aristobulus.”* This man was also the brother of King Agrippa, who killed James and tried to kill Peter, and now he has come to know Jesus Christ and he is serving in the church in Rome.

He goes on in Romans 16:11:

“Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.”

Herodion was another member of the extended Herodian family. The family of Narcissus, although this is really a rising trend in our society sociologically, Narcissus hasn't made a big comeback in terms of names. The narcissism index in the United States has risen 30 points in the last few years. I mentioned that a few weeks ago. The narcissism index is when you ask people the question: *“Are you a very important person? Are you the kind of person that people will write books about someday?”* and the vast majority of Americans living today say: *“Yes, I am that kind of person.”* That explains a lot of behavior that you see in the marketplace, in the mall, on the road. Narcissus, of course, is another name from mythology, and yet a Narcissus has come to know Jesus Christ.

I love this pair in Romans 16:12:

“Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa.”

These are two diminutive names, made-up names probably for identical twin girls, and their names mean *dainty* and *delicate*. Paul says these twin girls, probably young ladies with sweet names, *Miss Dainty* and *Missed Delicate*, know how to roll up their sleeves and really work for Jesus Christ. Isn't that great? There are no bleacher seats in the Kingdom of God. These precious little ones are described as hard workers in the Lord, together with Persis. In Romans 16:13, he says:

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.”

Mr. Red. Rufus means *red* in Latin. Whether he had red hair or he was one of those guys covered from head to toe with freckles, we are not told, but he is red. Maybe he was made fun of for his red hair or his head-to-toe freckles, who knows? But Paul says Mr. Red is chosen in

the Lord, and also greet his mother. We don't hear her name, but Paul says graciously that she has been a mother to him as well, and so we hear of another godly woman serving, ministering, making ministry come to be.

Romans 16:14-15 seem to me almost like descriptions of two different small groups. In verse 14 we see: Asyncritus (incomparable), Phlegon (a freed man's name), Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Maybe this is the Friday morning Bible study that meets together. In verse 15 is another list of names grouped together, possibly another group. All of these names matter because they signal before us the nature of a vibrant, healthy, flourishing church. The names are recorded. The names matter. The Word of God matters ultimately, and God has included these names within it.

Romans 16:16 is a test for all of us who wish to take the Bible seriously and literally, and it is a place where we all, for the most part, are disobedient to God: *"Greet one another with a holy kiss."* This is not the romantic, just-finished-the-wedding-vows-kiss-on-the-lips-to-the-ovation-of-the-crowd kind of kiss. This is the Mediterranean-style kiss, which is just cheek-to-cheek. There are some parts of the Mediterranean world where you get just one cheek, and there are some parts of the Mediterranean world where you get double cheeks, one and then the other. We are called to be family, and notice that this is a family group, treating one another with great affection. Do you see how from a human point of view the group that's described in Romans 16 has no other reason for all being together except for the gospel of Jesus Christ? This group does not belong together. There are pagans and Jews. There are Romans and Greeks. There are very wealthy people, patrons, members of an imperial family, and freed slaves. There are men and women. Ten of the 27 named ministry partners are women. This group does not cohere; it does not belong together in any human way, but this group is brought together on the level ground in front of the cross of Jesus Christ, and all of these people have had their hearts opened to the gospel. They have believed that Jesus is the promised Messiah. They have believed that they are justified freely by faith in Him. They have believed that they are called to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into Christ-likeness, and they believe that they are called and share God's mission in the world. Do you believe those things? If you do, then this group that I'm looking at here in front of me also belongs together. It is to be united. It shares something together that is so much more significant than our gender, than our ethnicity, than the balance of our bank accounts, than the ZIP Code in which we live. What we share in Jesus Christ binds us together into a unity that is extraordinary and breathtaking. It is a unity, though, that must be guarded and protected. It can be easily threatened, and Paul knows this well, born out of the fires of 25 years of ministry. He spent two chapters describing how Christians can easily start to criticize each other over secondary issues, and he has warned us about that. He knows the human heart well, that the human heart's default setting is to say: "I

am right and God is wrong.” He knows that the default setting of the human heart is to say: “I have the right to do whatever I want and to call that freedom.” The Bible calls that tyranny. The Bible calls everyone doing what's right in their own eyes chaos and disorder. I know that in this glowing, warm, fuzzy list of names, some of you may be percolating over the name Ampliatus and think: “I never considered that for my child.” Others feel just tremendous warmth with the name Phoebe: “I love it!” Others are thinking maybe of their pets and thinking of names like Rufus and Urbanus. Some of you are thinking now of conferring new names on your graduates as you send them into the world.

Yet, there is a wise and necessary addition to this warm and fuzzy list of names in Romans 16:17. Paul says:

“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.”

Watch out because there are times when people in the community will seek to cause division. They will seek to create obstacles and barriers to ministry. This whole list of names is filled with people who were making ministry happen and rush forward, and Paul uses the same word that we spent a month on in our January series from Philippians 3:17: “Join in imitating me.” He said to keep your eyes on those walking to this example. The main verb of Philippians 3:17 is the same one here: *watch, mark*, put a mark on people living Christ-like lives. He uses the same word here to say: “Mark, note, be careful, some people in their fallenness will try to stir division, create obstacles and roadblocks for ministry. Watch out for that.” In Philippians 3, he says: “Mark those walking according to the example you have.” It is a precious gift to share this sacred community. This gift of life together has to be cultivated and guarded. Be careful, if someone comes to you and says: “Hey, I'm really upset with you over the Bible translation that you are using.” Just say: “Brother, that's a secondary topic.” If someone comes you and they really want to argue or they give you one of these pseudo-invitations to dinner, and you realize that the invitation to dinner is really a secret tactic to talk about all the things they're upset about, just say: “Brother, sister, we've been unjustified by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and we stand together.” Paul says to avoid such things. He goes further and says in Romans 16:18:

“For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.”

In the other side of this warning, he says in Romans 16:19:

“For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”

I want you to know what is good well. Know the good. Be experienced in it. Know the ins and outs of that which is good, and be innocent, or literally *ignorant*, of evil. When people are

trained by the FBI to spot counterfeit currency, they don't teach them all the different variations of the fake. People who are trained to recognize authentic, genuine currency master the true one. They master the genuine, so that when a counterfeit appears, it is obvious. It's a little like my wife. If you put a page of text in front of her, she has this extraordinary ability, even if it's single spaced, eight-point font, with no margins, she can see the whole thing and spot the spelling errors in it. It is really remarkable, and it is very humbling to those who write documents like that. But, it's a good thing to spot the error, and then correct it. To know the good, be innocent or ignorant of evil. Paul is confident that the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet, he says, alluding to Genesis 3:15 and the great victory of Jesus.

Paul not only greets the vibrant, flourishing Christian community in Rome in Romans 16 as the Church of Christ, but at the very ending of the letter Paul sends greetings from the people with whom he is working. We should never work and serve alone. This is true in children's ministry; it is true in youth ministry; it is true in an adult small group; it is true for a pastoral staff team. Paul never worked alone. I had a great privilege this week of leading a portion of a staff retreat for Call of Love Ministries, which is a ministry partner that we support. They produce evangelistic programs that are seen by over 200 million homes a week inside the Muslim world, presenting Christ. We got to spend several hours with their staff, and my portion of the teaching was just to emphasize for them, through the life of Paul, that he never ministers alone. He doesn't serve alone, and we see this here. He sends greetings from Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. We read in verse 22 finally about how he is serving. Not only does he work in a team, but he also recognizes the gifts that others have that are necessary.

We finally meet in Romans 16:22 the real scribe for the letter of Romans as he appears from behind the desk and says:

"I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord."

Tertius is one of these really boring Roman names. Romans had very little creativity. Their architecture is just arch, arch, arch, and the same in their naming of their children. There is just a very small set of personal names for Roman children, and many Roman children are simply given the names of *Primus*, *Secundus*, *Tertius*, and so on: *kid one*, *kid two*, *kid three*. It has the strength of order, but there are obvious weaknesses. Even the Roman Emperor Octavius is *kid eight* in his family. Well, *Kid Three* writes this letter. He is the one writing this down.

The letter of Romans was written on papyrus leaves, and it would look like this. This is a very early example of one of Paul's letters. We can see why Paul needed *Tertius'* help because these papyrus leaves are written with a trained hand. This is what Romans would look like. There is no punctuation; there are no spaces in the words; common words are abbreviated, and the

very first word of all of Paul's letters is the same: *Paul*, identifying the sender. He also sends greetings from Gaius, who hosts him, and Erastus, the city treasurer. Erastus is dear to my heart, because Erastus is responsible for the greatest breakfast phone call I have ever received in my life. As we were gathered around the Palmer table at breakfast, the phone rang early. It was extra early, a strange hour for a call. Caller ID provided no direct assistance, for the number was a foreign number. We wondered who was calling at 6:30 in the morning to sell us something. Who knows who this is? I decided to pick up the phone, and it was Aaron Osterbrock on the phone. Some of you know Aaron. He said: "David, I need your help. I'm standing in ancient Corinth, and you said that there is a really famous inscription here. Where is it?" I did what any responsible pastor would do at 6:30 in the morning when he receives a call from the ancient ruins of Corinth. I said: "Where are you? What you looking at? Find the ancient theater and walk down the steps. Turn left at the base of the theater. There is a paved street going by the ruins of the theater, and if you turn left again, you should stop and look down and there's an inscribed stone still in the ground."



stone still in the ground." He said: "I see it! I see it!" This is the stone. It was set by Erastus, the city treasurer in Corinth. It says in Latin: "Erastus, on behalf of his office of city treasurer responsible for public works, out of his own funds laid this pavement." You are looking at the name of a man converted by Paul, who sends greetings to the church at Rome. Every name matters. Yours does, too.

The grand finale of Romans is the blessing at the end, Romans 16:25-27:

"Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

Paul's letter has taken us toward God's purpose in the world, and he ends this beautiful, profound letter, this explanation of the gospel, with this extended blessing. Paul's prayer is to God. He knows that God is able to strengthen you and me and that we get strong in this world by the gospel. The gospel changes us. It makes strong, and the preaching of Jesus Christ makes

us stronger, it makes us wiser, it makes us understand who God is and who we are. The preaching of Jesus Christ is according to the revelation of God's mystery, God's plans, His secret counsel that was held in secret in Scripture for long ages, but now is made known. The gospel is out. It is in the public sphere. It is made known according to God's command, His decision, and it is made known to all peoples, to all nations, for this great purpose: to change us, to bring about the obedience of faith. I grew up in a family where we didn't talk a lot about obedience, but this for me has become a word that I have grown to love. The only context I had for obedience was teaching dogs to obey, and that always seemed like a negative, watching dog trainers meet a new dog and hold its face to the ground. In my thinking, that didn't look good. That is not the picture. The picture is that you and I, through the gospel, get changed. We get changed from being a people who want to do our own thing, to people that want to do God's thing. We get changed from a people whose lives are an absolute wreck, to lives that are in order and under control. We get changed from the spiraling chaos of Romans 1 into a people living as living sacrifices in Romans 12. We get changed from a people that wander and flounder without any clear purpose for living, to a people that have been conscripted into God's mission in the world. You and I find the meaning of our lives in praise and worship and in service to God. Romans has called us to this throughout, and it is to the only wise God that Paul says *be glory forever through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

As we leave this powerful, longest of Paul's letters, I want to challenge each of us once again at Kenwood:

Number one: I want to challenge us that the ***names matter***, each one. Know the names around you, and know the worlds represented by those names.

Number two: I want to challenge you that ***this church is called to be a thriving, healthy church, with men and women, different nationalities, different social classes, different skill sets, all brought together, unified by the gospel.***

Number three: I want to challenge you that, in the end, ***Kenwood is called*** by hearing Romans well ***into God's future which is being engaged in God's mission, reaching out to our neighboring communities, displaying the gospel in our life together.*** We will go from this place this summer to an equipping series where we will strive to get more confident in talking about Christ and with those around us. But, as we have heard this precious text, my deepest prayer has been the same all spring: that Kenwood would be changed, that David Palmer would be changed by the gospel, and that God's renewed humanity in Jesus Christ would be on display in our life together. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we honor You. You have the Name above all names. We ask, Lord, that by faith in You we would strive side-by-side, together, in the gospel, and that, Lord Jesus, You would help

us to be a community that reflects this transformation. Lord, help each of us to give our gifts, talents, and time to Your service. Lord, hold us back from making a big deal about what You don't seem to. Guard us, Lord, from ever pressing for division and failing to protect and preserve and cultivate this bond of peace You given to us through Jesus. We love You, Lord. I pray, Father, that You would breathe upon this church, even right now. Holy Spirit, that You would fill us, that You would so fill us that You would overflow in and through us to our families, our neighborhoods, community, and world, and that You would use this church as an instrument for the advancement of Your Kingdom, and that Father, You would fill us with bold conviction and deep humility, and that we would live and walk in such a way together that Jesus Christ might be better known here and in our communities. We give You our praise. We ask that You would help us to walk by faith.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.