

Romans 16:1-16 | Tom Grass

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Preacher: Tom Grass

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Thank you for time to look at it, challenge by it, be encouraged by it, and go forth to serve you with maybe a new sense of purpose this morning.

It's easy to get sidetracked, bogged down in the things of this world, things of life, and the years go by and we say we'll serve you tomorrow.

And we don't. Or we say we will and we don't, those kind of things. But just help us to serve where we're planted, where we're at. Help us to have unity.

Bind us together, Lord. Bind us together. You know, it's interesting. You expect and deserve that the church would be united.

Believers would get along and be united. Not lip service to unity, but real unity. Because you paid a price to do that.

[1 : 12] You gave the ultimate sacrifice, your death on the cross. Lay aside your glory. Stepped into time. Redeemed mankind. And broke down all kinds of barriers and walls between races, sexes, ethnic groups, position in society.

All for the gospel to be shared for mankind. And God, we get in the way of that. I get in the way of that, and I'm sorry for that.

Just help us to do what you call us to do in simplest ways and in great ways, whatever it is. In Jesus' name, amen. My wife reminded me of a phrase before I came up here.

God does not call the qualified. He qualifies the one he calls. Be willing to serve the Lord.

I mean, that's, you know, be willing. Be willing to serve him. I feel like I go to speak sometimes.

[2 : 22] It's like I get this message ready, and then all of a sudden it's like, Lord, I don't even know if that's what you want me to say. And it's kind of interesting how your brain does that or the spirit moves you, and then something like this happens.

I just wasn't expecting this, of course, with Jacob, you know. He's my youngest of five, and I'm thankful that he's willing to put himself in a position where he'll serve you, Lord.

You know? You know, Kevin prayed it where he does take, as he always has, taking responsibility in little things and just serves and grows as the Lord leads them.

And even, like my wife and I would attest, that Turkey Hill is a great place for kids to go and serve the Lord and grow up in their spirituality, grow up in their commitment to the Lord.

And Kevin reminds me of the Apostle Paul and the way that he can just remember these guys' names in these different groups around the country and name them in a prayer.

[3 : 33] You know, I'd have to have written down. Sonny, Steve, Mr. Price, you know. You know, I mean, I'd stumble over it if I just had to say it. That's just me.

But Kevin can, like, list off all these people. And if we're observant, we would find that there are so many people that touch our lives. And we tend to take people very for granted, don't we?

You know? Especially, like, if you're in a job a long time, you know you've been taken advantage of, right? Isn't that how you feel? Obviously, I've been walked on. I've been treaded on. They just expect you to do something.

And you're just there. You know, that's how you feel. I'm just there. But, you know, the Lord takes notice of those who serve. And there's a lot of people that come in throughout the years.

Right here at Bethel, like, I think of Bill from Storybook, you know. Receive him when he comes, like a brother in the Lord. You know, Paul tells us, receive them. And Paul gives us all these names, these 35 people that he mentions that are in Corinth or in Rome, or ministered with him throughout the years.

[4 : 40] And he just says, receive them as you should in the Lord. And it's really interesting when you think about it, how that's what God calls us to. You know, if you go down to Turkey Hill, receive these guys that serve there as they should deserve in the Lord, like Noah and the Williams and Sonny.

And, you know, we've had some great examples lately of men who've gone on to be with the Lord, who gave their life for the Lord. And Jim Fitzgerald and Sonny Williams. There are so many people that, as you reflect on your life, that you know God put in your life, put in our midst to be encouraged by, challenged by, raised up by, you know what I mean?

Like, to grow up under these people. Like, I told some guys at work the other day, I said, these young guys, you know, they're in their 20s, young 20s, I said, I'm giving you the chance to grow up and become men. They're young men.

And I said, you can do it here, or you can do it somewhere else, but eventually you're going to have to mature and grow up. I'm giving you the opportunity to do it here, without all the pressures, you know. And I feel like that's the way Christianity is.

You know, you're given a chance in a local body to grow up unto the Lord without risk. You know, you're really protected by the leadership. You know, we won't put you out there too far.

[6 : 01] The leaders will not let that rope go out too far. You know, but yet we let people come in and serve. And we expect it. We're a small group. I'm just kind of rambling, you know.

And that's all right. These aren't in my notes, so bear with me. You know, I'm a big football fan. You know, I like the NFL. I liked watching that game yesterday between Georgia and Alabama.

You know, I wanted it too. And I like the strategy of football because it changes as the game goes on. And you all know I'm a big fan of the greatest quarterback ever. But he was the 199th pick overall.

And he was the fourth-string quarterback on that team that year. And he's gone on to play until now. He's 44 years old. I won't mention his name. And other people in the NFL that have made it.

And they're walk-ons. If I tell you some of these names, some of you that follow the NFL will go, there's no way. J.J. Watt. Baker Mayfield. The linebacker for the Packers.

[7 : 07] Long-haired guy. What's his name? Clay Matthews. Back in the 80s, there was a guy named Earl Hershiser. He was a pitcher for the Dodgers. Some of you may remember him.

And he, in high school, played baseball in what didn't really, wasn't the first guy to make the team. Or, you know, he's like the last guy to make the team. Junior, the last guy on the team.

Senior, wasn't he? And he started pitching more his senior year. Goes to college. Last guy picked. Do you know what I mean? Then goes on to become a world champion. Great pitcher for the Dodgers.

Why do I bring up things like that? It's just because where are you at right now? Where are you at right now? Take where you're at right now. Let the Lord use you. I don't believe that God has this great big plan for everybody.

Like, you're going to be this guy up here. And there's danger in being that top guy, right? There's a lot of danger in that. Falling out. Things like that. Serve the Lord as he brings things along your way.

[8 : 06] And walk in it. If he takes it away, let it go. If he gives you more, embrace it, right? So, you know, we go through these verses, and it seems like there's insignificant names in Romans 16.

It's just a list of names. But they're not insignificant. These are real people, flesh and blood, that serve the Lord in faithfulness and are forever written down in the Scriptures.

Twice in the last few months, I've heard someone say something. They're looking forward to heaven because they can't wait for the fellowship that's going to be there.

And Kevin said it once, and I read it or listened to it on a message about these verses. And I have to admit, I have not really considered that as part of my heavenly experience.

It's just not something that's, like, right there, you know? But thinking about it a little bit more, I thought, well, gee whiz, why not? Why wouldn't we be able to hear each other's stories of redemption?

[9 : 07] Hear each other's story of how he brought me out of the pit I was in, you know? The destructive life I was living and brought me to himself. Won't that be great to sit down with each other?

You know, hey, Sonny Williams, during this life I never heard your story. Tell me now. You've got all eternity. It takes as much time as you want. You know? Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, in a

message he gave in Romans 16, asked a reflective question.

What will heaven be like? Just think, we'll be meeting these people and others and hearing the story of the grace of God of their lives. Hearing about their hardships and their lives. If you're a clock watcher at Bethel, you may get frustrated when you see the time.

You know the meeting should have started by now, and you still hear people talking. Quote, fellowshiping. You might want to change your perspective about that and think how much they must love each other.

I have to admit, I am a clock watcher at Bethel. And I do get frustrated. As a matter of fact, we started seven minutes late. So, and I had just soon finished my message today, and if you want to leave, go ahead.

[10:18] And if your clock says go, go. Mine says keep talking, I'm going to keep talking. So my clock's broken this morning. So, all right. In Philippians, we can look at your handout, and I'll try to follow it.

I don't know. I can't promise I will. So, in Philippians chapter 2, verse 25 and 29 to 30, Paul says we're to receive one another with all joy.

Paul's comments when he sends a person as a representative for him is to receive them with all joy. In Philippians, it says, I thought it necessary to send you Epaphroditus, my brother, and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need.

Receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold people like him in high regard. Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to compensate for your absence and your service to me.

Really cutting words, right? He says, Epaphroditus did what you should have done, and he almost died doing it. Wow.

[11:29] In Romans 16, I mentioned there's 35 people mentioned.

He wrote, Paul wrote, of the mutual love and tender affection that believers have toward one another. This was contrary to the Roman culture and practice at that time.

Jesus said that the world will know we are his disciples because we love one another. If you think of the verses in 1 Corinthians 13, which are very familiar about love, at the very end, it talks about, it says, But faith, hope, and love remain.

These three remain, but the greatest of these is love. And Paul said in there, If I spoke with tongues of angels but had not love, I'm just an empty-sounding gong, making noise, like me trying to play an instrument up here.

But if I don't have love, I'm nothing. We are nothing. The gospel, this is on your handout, unites diverse people because we are all one in Christ.

[12:35] That's how we are. Variety with unity. Galatians 3, these are on your handout, 22, 26, to 29.

But the scripture has confirmed, Everyone understands that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ must be given to all who believe. We're all equal before God, right?

All sin falls short of the glory of God. And there's other verses listed which you can look at on your own.

A second theme in these verses is on your handout also.

The New Testament teaches that the believer should be a servant for the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 1, 8-10, For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need to say nothing.

[13:36] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned from God. You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

That verse has so much in it about being called out of the world, called unto God, called unto service, called unto each other, and our final deliverance from the world, from the wrath to come.

There's other verses listed there which you can look up on your own. And then thirdly, on your handout, the New Testament has a variety of names or descriptions of those who have trusted Christ for their salvation.

It's interesting, if you go through just Romans 16, there's a bunch. The church, in Christ Jesus, firstfruits, in the Lord, chosen in the Lord, brethren, sisters, saints.

There's a lot of phrases in this little section of Scripture. One I'd like to look at is the church. What is the church? You know, in one of these verses it says about, and I think Priscilla and Aquila, and the church that meets in their house.

[14:52] Wait a minute. How does a church meet in a house? Because the church is the called out people. It's a Greek word. Ecclesia, called out, or to.

We're called out of the world unto Christ. I wrote out a good working definition of the church right here. People called out from the world and to God.

The outcome being the church. The mystical body of Christ. That is the universal, total body of believers whom God calls out from the world and into his eternal kingdom.

I like this other word, saints. You know, the appropriate use of that term is set apart ones, sanctified, sacred, holy.

It means likeness of nature with the Lord because we are different from the world. That's the saying. Not what other denominations might call it.

[15:51] I think we'll come back to the last part, finish strong, after we look at some of these verses in Romans 16. I'll just read it and pay note of these names.

They mean nothing to you. Most of them. Priscilla and Aquila will. Phoebe might. There's a few in there that go, oh, I recognize that name. Others will go, I don't know that person. I don't know who Rufus is.

I don't care. You know, I mean, who is Rufus? I don't know. It's not something I'm naming one of my kids. I don't have that chance anymore. Don't do it. I don't know.

Maybe you should. Maybe it's great. All right. But listen to the words in here. There's some strong words. Commend. You know, just listen for these words.

Service. Things like that. Verse 1. I commend you, Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church in Centuria, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever business she is in need of you.

[16:50] For indeed, she has been a helper of many, and myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also the churches of the Gentiles.

Likewise, greet the churches in their house. Greet my beloved Eponetus, who is the firstfruits of Acacia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us.

Greet Androconus and Junia, my countrymen and fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who were in Christ before me.

Greet Amplius, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ. And Staius, my beloved. Interesting, that's...

Anyway, I'll go on. Greet Apellas, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household Aristobulus. Greet Herodian, my countrymen. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

[17:52] Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother in mine.

Greet Asencretus, Phlegion, Hermes, Petrobos, Hermes, and the brethren who are with him. Greet Phologius and Julia, Nerys and her sister, and Olympus, and all the saints who are with him.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you. I'm terrible at names, so that was brutal. When we think of Phoebe, so she's in Corinth with Paul.

She goes on to Shancrea and leaves with this letter of the Romans to take it to Rome. She was a Gentile. Some people say her name refers to the Greek goddess Diana, a shining one.

She's described as a deacon, a deaconess. What? A woman? Deacon? Hey, it's there.

[19:06] It's possible. In that culture, he had a lot of men and women, did a lot of things separate, much more segregated than today. So a woman would be appropriately there to serve the women of the church.

It would probably fit. However, Scripture clearly teaches if you go in Titus and you read the qualifications of a deacon, she'd be the husband of one wife. Right? So we would say a deacon today is a male.

Just saying what the Scripture says. I believe it's in 1 Timothy chapter 3 that teaches that. There's always opportunities to serve in a local church.

You know that? She was from the church in Centuria. Centuria is a port city about nine miles from Corinth.

This is the city where Paul cut his hair because he has taken a vow, which is recorded in Acts 18. It is understood that Phoebe was entrusted to take this letter to Rome. Romans is like one of the longest letters Paul wrote, right?

[20 : 09] And we often think of the doctrines that come out of Romans, don't you? When we were younger, at the Christian bookstore, they sold pencils that had the Roman road on them. You could actually have the gospel printed on a pencil and you could give it to people.

Hey, here's the gospel on a pencil. You don't see that. I don't see them anymore. Where are they? So here's some irony. Think about the irony of this letter.

Be delivered in the circumstances that led to it being written. This prominent woman, using the port city shipping routes that she seems to be familiar with, arrives in Rome.

She travels roads laid down by the Roman government, who persecuted the church. Delivering a letter full of doctrine from Corinth to Rome, written by a Jewish Sanhedrin who persecuted the church, and is now an apostle who is the apostle to the Gentiles.

Furthermore, we read in Romans 13, 25-28, that Paul states he's going to Jerusalem with a bag of money from Gentile believers to relieve the Christians in Jerusalem.

[21 : 16] To me, those concepts and thoughts came out together like, what irony, right? That's what God wants to do.

He wants to break down all these walls, all these barriers, all these divisions, and have unity in Christ. One of the words I used in the handout was diversity.

Boy, that word sure has taken on new meaning. You know? Think how far we've come as a culture. There's no way I'd get through all this with all these people.

It's just unbelievable when you stop and think about it. Priscilla and Aquila. This couple fled from Rome during the persecution that occurred there.

Paul met them in Corinth. Paul was with them in Ephesus. They were tent makers, as was Paul. Paul refers them to his fellow workers in Christ. Then they go back to Rome.

[22 : 20] These people traveled. This couple. And I believe in verse 4 of Romans 16, it says about these two, who risked their own necks for my life.

These couple, where are they today? Give me a couple of them. You know? Who is a Priscilla and Aquila you know today? There may be some.

I'm not saying there aren't. I'm just saying that, you know, wow. Paul had some people that were willing to just go to the end of the earth for him. Go to the death for him. And for who else?

For the Lord. Because they were united for the gospel. Together in the gospel, serving the Lord. They teach Apollos.

That's a great story. Right? They find Apollos. Strong in the word. They teach him a better way. How about, let's look at this one down here.

[23 : 20] Romans 16, 6. Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Some guys say she labored to the point of exhaustion.

She didn't just labor like others who are listed labored. She labored much. You know? There are times in your life you will labor to the point of exhaustion. I think, Jacob, you're probably laboring to the point of exhaustion just trying to leave.

Wrapping up college stuff. Wrapping up stuff to travel internationally. Finishing a semester early in nursing school. Not this semester. He's finishing early so he can go on that trip.

That's a lot of pressure. He's laboring much right now. Romans 16, 7. These are interesting people. Androconus and Junia.

Androconus is a Greek name. Greek name. Identified with slaves. Junia is a Roman name that can be male or female. But here we believe it's a man because it says kinsman. They were in prison with Paul somewhere in the Roman Empire.

[24 : 23] We don't know where. They were early converts to the faith. Interesting phrase here. They're in Christ before me. And Paul uses that word a lot. In Christ.

In his writings. And yet he says this phrase, which Paul seems to have coined, is used of these early believers by Paul. I find that really fascinating. See what's there though?

You've got a Roman and a Greek working together with Paul. A Jew. Roman citizen. All these people united for one purpose. Romans 16, 8, and 9.

Amplius and Urbanus are common slave names. Stachys may have been in a royal household, they say. Paul calls them beloved and fellow worker.

Apollos, verse 10. The approved one. He must have endured some kind of test. Something must have happened where he proved himself worthy.

[25 : 20] He persevered through something. We don't know. He's approved in Christ. That'd be enough for me. Tom Grass, approved in Christ. Only that was really, you know. Aristobos's household.

Grandson of Herod the Great. That's crazy. That's crazy. How about 16, 12? This is really interesting.

Some people say that these two are possibly twins. They were probably women of means.

Tryphena and Tryphosa. Workers in the Lord.

Workers in the Lord. These two ladies. Working for the Lord. What a great thing. Their name means delicate and dainty.

These two women labored for the Lord. I call them tough little women for Jesus. You know? My wife works for a lady at a barn. What is Audrey? 80-something? Tough little woman with horses, man.

[26 : 23] Little lady cannot work any of you in this room just about. Maybe not. You know what I mean? She's just one of those tough, old, older persons. I hope I didn't get myself in trouble there.

Rufus, verse 13, probably. Possibly related to Paul. It doesn't mean this is Paul and Rufus' mother. It's just a fond greeting. You know, greet her mother too.

This is interesting to me, this verse 13.

This is something that kind of stood out to me. Listen to this. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother in mine. There's this little shift right here by Paul. He's talking about laboring, serving.

Right?

And he says, chosen in the Lord. And I thought, it's like Paul interjects grace among all the hard workers listed. To me, it's a subtle reminder of God being the initiator of a person coming to Christ.

[27 : 24] He chose us. Rufus, chosen in the Lord. Dave Stout, chosen in the Lord. Dave Baumgartner, chosen in the Lord. You know, you're working, you're working, you're working.

You've got to stop sometimes when you're working so hard, you know. It's Tuesday night something, Wednesday night youth group, Sunday morning. I speak. You're chosen in the Lord, Tom. Yeah, I'm chosen in the Lord.

We remember it Sunday mornings here at Bethel every week. You're chosen in the Lord. It's a simple thing. Do this remembrance of me. But it's a reminder that we're chosen in the Lord.

Come. Come at 9 o'clock. You have nothing to share. Embrace that you're chosen in the Lord. You know? Don't always feel like it. It's early.

You're pushing all week. You're chosen in the Lord. Why not? Let yourself remember that every week. Come at 9 o'clock. Bring your kids.

[28 : 20] I don't care if they're noisy. No one here will care if your kids are noisy during that meeting. We'll help you with them. Some will. Titus 3.5.

He saved us. Not because of the righteous things we have done. Not works. Not service. Right?

Not church membership. He saved us. Not the things we've done, but because of his mercy.

He washed away our sins. Giving us new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. Titus 3.5. Didn't cost me much, but it cost him.

It cost Jesus everything. So I could be with you in unity serving him. There's two more.

You know, verse 16. Greet one another with a holy kiss. It's kind of interesting that Paul's talking about service, work, service, work.

[29 : 18] All these things. And then he just says, greet one another. You know? Greet one another. Salute one another. Greet one another in an affectionate manner. That is, treat each other with kindness and love.

And embrace all proper marks of affection. You know, just embrace each other. Be really genuinely thankful for the other person. You know, if you're one that struggles with getting real close to people, it's hard to think like that.

You know? It's hard to embrace people. If you work with people all week, sometimes you're like, I don't feel like talking anymore this week. But God calls us to something different as believers.

It's a really special calling, and it's high. I agree. But embrace each other. Salute one another. And then, of course, Paul says, you know, the churches of Christ greet you.

Paul, I don't know how he knows all this. You know, there is no internet. There's no phone. Paul knows all these people. He doesn't follow them on Instagram, Twitter.

[30 : 32] He doesn't know. You know, I think sometimes he wrote this letter to these people. Some of these people could have been dead by the time they got the letter. I don't know. You know, how did Paul know all these people?

It's inspired by the Holy Spirit, so we'd assume they're still living when they get the letter. We don't know. But, you know, he knew people, and he cherished people. He relied on people. You know, you think of him as being this strong, dominant guy, which he was.

But he had people like Priscilla and Aquila, you know. John Mark, useful to me now. Please send them to me. Bring my coat. It's getting colder when he was in prison. As we conclude, the musician could come up.

The conclusion this morning would be finish strong. As you get a little older, you begin to think, how should I end my life?

Not end my life, but what should I do? Like that? COVID done, take me. I'm going to take it myself. How should we end our years on this earth?

[31 : 37] You know, there's more behind me than in front of me. You know, there's a good number of us in this room that would qualify for it. Frank, you especially, you know. I mean, definitely more years behind you, brother, than in front of you.

But let's look at some verses as we conclude. Finish strong. Embrace the church. Embrace his people. Get a little outside of yourself.

You know, do something. Do something, would you? Sometimes at work I get frustrated and I see an employee just standing there like this. I go, grab a broom.

Grab a broom. Just sweep that bay for me before I clean your clock. But I can't say, you know, it's like, just stop and just do something.

Pick up the cigarette butts you threw on the ground. You know, I mean, seriously. You know, that's how you begin to think, you know, as you get, just do something. You know, Sunday morning, I say this sometimes, and I don't know if I've said it for a while, but if you want to know what to do with Bethel, just follow an elder, follow a deacon, follow their wives around on Sunday.

[32 : 43] What's her to do with Bethel? She, I don't know. Just watch Debbie. Watch Mary Ellen. Watch David. Learn the sound. You don't even have to learn the sound to do the sound.

Let me know. I know that to be true because I can do it. And I don't know the sound, but I can turn it on. I can adjust. I can hit a button and figure out, turn the microphone on. You can learn Songshow Plus.

It's not hard. If you can do, if you can search online on your phone, you can learn Songshow Plus. So put your little can over there in that seat. Say, I'll do this. You know, I'm sorry, I'll stop.

So let's look at these verses as we conclude. Acts, they're on your handout. Acts 20, 24.

I consider my life of no value to me if only I may finish my course and complete the ministry I have received from the Lord Jesus, the ministry of testifying the good news of God's grace.

[33 : 38] That's Paul at the end of his life. Paul again in 2 Timothy, verse chapter 4. I am ready to be poured out like a drink offering. Boy, I am not there.

I am not there. And the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. 1 Timothy chapter 1.

A charge to anyone younger than me. And older, in this case, too. There's people in here that are older. No names this time.

1 Timothy 1. This charge I entrust you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecy previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

Paul and others in the writing says, follow me as I follow Christ. I find that to be one of the most challenging verses in all of Scripture. Follow me as I follow Christ. I want to be able to say that someday.

[34 : 46] You know? I want to be able to say that to a young man. Follow me as I follow Christ. And as we stop here, you know, I'm just going to read what I wrote down here.

As we consider these examples of faithful servants of Christ, may we press on in our walk with him to be an example and witness to others in the church and in the world.

Okay? May our uniqueness point others to Christ. Don't look down on the fact that you're different.
Or we're different.
May that uniqueness point others to Christ. Amen.