



Romans 16:1-16

“Well, I suppose...” In Wisconsin, what do those words mean? They mean that it’s about time to leave the conversation, right? I only discovered this a few years ago after living in Wisconsin for nearly twenty years. But now I hear it all the time. “Well I suppose...” And the beauty of this phrase is that it doesn’t have to be followed by anything else. You don’t need to say, “Well I suppose I’d better get going.” It’s not necessary to say “Well I suppose it’s about time we head out. I’ve got a lot of work at home to do.” All you need to do is say “Well, I suppose” and everyone instinctively knows that you’re getting ready to leave. Start listening for this phrase and you’ll be amazed at how often you hear it.

This is what chapter sixteen of Romans is all about. If he were a Wisconsinite, Paul would have stared the chapter with those amazing three words: “Well, I suppose...” This is the departing words of the apostle Paul in this most famous of his letter to New Testament churches. And it’s also the longest conclusion and contains by far the most greetings in his letters. Most of you probably have at least one Bible verse displayed in your house, whether it’s on a wall plaque, on your frig or even a coffee cup in your kitchen cabinet. But I can almost guarantee you that no one has any verses from Romans chapter sixteen. No one, and I mean no one has verse fifteen on a wall plaque anywhere! *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.* These just don’t make for exciting life verses.

However, here’s a big however, that does not mean they are unimportant or not worth our time. A list of greeting like this is not unlike reading and studying one of the genealogies in the Old Testament or the gospels. On the surface they seem plain and perhaps a little boring bit underneath they have rich and relevant meaning. With that in mind, follow along as I read this passage.

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, 2 that you may 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.*

*3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers **in Christ Jesus**, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were **in Christ** before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved **in the Lord**. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker **in Christ**, and my beloved Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved **in Christ**. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. 11 Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those **in the Lord** who belong to the family of Narcissus. 12 Greet those workers **in the Lord**, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard **in the Lord**. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen **in the Lord**; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

I'm sure you all remember this [tragedy five years](#) ago in Chile which had a happy ending. These 33 miners were trapped under a half mile of solid rock for 69 days. Their rescue was one of the greatest rescue stories ever. It just so happens that a movie about this story is due to be released in November.

Of course the wives and children of the miners cheered when they were rescued, but why did the practically everyone else in the country cheer almost as loudly? They cheered because they felt a powerful bond with their fellow countrymen. The 12 year old boy in Santiago cheered almost as if his own father were rescued from the heart of the earth. A 69 year old woman in the mountain village of San Pedro de Atacama cheered wildly because it felt a lot like it was her own son who was saved. There was a bond and a unity that can only be felt if you yourself were a Chilean.

In the same way, Paul's greetings have an underpinning of close relationships that exist within the body of Christ. He took the time to include these personal greetings in this letter, not just to be formal or give kudos to his buddies. These were Christians who had lived in the trenches with Paul, who had supported Paul, who loved Paul, who literally risked their lives for Paul. We can say with confidence that without these kinds of people, Paul could not have been Paul. God ordained that they live and work together in fellowship. They felt a kinship with one another that transcended mere words.

Do you have this kind of fellowship? Do you live in the trenches with other believers? Do you depend heavily on some people and do they lean just as much on you? This is what the Christian life is all about. This past week in our family devotions, I was struck by a verse in Ephesians 4. The context is the body of Christ being equipped and working together. *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love* (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The part that hit me that day was “when each part is working properly.” What we so often fail to understand about our faith is that it is a unified faith. For the whole to work properly, each part must work properly. The body of Christ is like a car. If the pistons seize up, it doesn’t matter if the windshield wipers can wick water away like nobody’s business. If the engine is shot, at that point it doesn’t matter if all of the other parts are working OK.

This is the corporate nature of our faith. When you are saved, you are saved out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. Salvation is personal, there’s no question about that. No one else can ride on your coattails into the kingdom. But salvation is also intensely kingdom-oriented. All believers are a part of the Kingdom of God. You are forever linked to the body of Christ. You are now a member of the family of God. And in order for the body to work properly, each member must work properly. In other words, we desperately need each other. This is one of the clear messages of Paul’s final greetings. Let me pull out some of the way that we need one another.

Generous Giving

The first greeting Paul offered was to Phoebe who was “a patron of many and of myself as well.” This means that Phoebe probably had the means to help spread the gospel by financially supporting Paul and others. Paul was a tentmaker and used this skill to pay his own way but that did not mean that he never received financial help from others. Jesus has his patrons as well. As you know, Judas carried the money bag which apparently held so much money that Judas was able to routinely steal from the pot without being detected. Jesus did not use the carpentry skills that his father taught him to pay his way from town to town. He depended upon the gifts of patrons and supporters

The gospel always requires people to give sacrificially. There is no ministry without financial generosity. Let me read a portion of chapter fifteen that I did not cover before in previous weeks.

For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings (Romans 15:26-27).

Do you see what Paul is saying here? He used some very strong language-“Indeed, they owe it to them.” This is a summary statement of the eighth and ninth chapters of 2 Corinthians. The Macedonian believers were very generous. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part (2 Corinthians 8:1-2).* This may be my favorite verse on giving in the whole Bible. Poverty and affliction turned into joyous generosity. Why? Do you see the key word here? *The **grace** of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.* God’s undeserved, infinite grace is supposed to overflow in our lives. It is the spiritual engine that drives our actions.

This is why Paul said that the Macedonians “owed” it to the Jewish believers. The Gentiles shared in the spiritual blessing of salvation through the Jews. Grace produces generosity of all kinds, including financial generosity. Here is the simple principle: if you are not a generous person—despite your financial situation—then you lack grace. You probably have saving grace but you have not yet experienced the effect of that grace in your life. The gospel needs generous givers so that it can be spread throughout the world. And the beauty is that the gospel not only needs generous givers but it also produces generous givers.

Sacrificial Service

Prisca and Aquilla, who are usually called Priscilla and Aquilla. Paul first met them in Corinth. *After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome...and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.* (Acts 18:1-2).

Soon after, Priscilla and Aquilla joined Paul on his church planting journeys. But the most important point Paul made was that they “risked their necks for my life.” One interesting point is that “risking your neck” was a saying two thousand years ago. It sounds like a 21st century saying but it clearly is not. We don’t know the details of this event because it was not recorded in Scripture but its’ enough to know that they actually put their own lives at risk to save Paul’s life. Whatever they did, it was sacrificial service at the highest level.

Jesus famously said, *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends* (John 15;13). It is unlikely that you and I will be asked to “risk our necks” for the sake of the gospel and it’s probably a good thing since I am guessing that most of us would not pass the test. Speaking of tests, here’s a simple one. How willing are you to share the gospel at your place of employment? How likely are you to stick up for Biblical principles in a casual conversation? By that I do not mean being a bully or being obnoxious. That is never a good idea and it is certainly not courageous. But if you are not willing to speak out and speak up in the small things, it is almost a guarantee that you would not be willing to risk your neck for the sake of the gospel. The gospel requires sacrificial service of all kinds. Jesus’ gospel deserves sacrificial service and Paul was extremely grateful for his good friends.

Joyous Ministry

In verse five, one man received a very simple but powerful greeting. *Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.* Can you imagine how Paul must have felt when Epaenetus repented and trusted Christ? Think back to the day you were saved. Some of you have a point in time and for others it was more of a process. I will never forget that hot day in August of 1980 when I responded to the altar call in my friend’s church. I cried in front of 150 or so people but I felt washed clean as snow. Thirty five years later I have a deeper appreciation of this amazing grace but the initial joy will never leave me.

I want you to do something. Even if you don’t know the exact day of your conversion, most of you will know the year that you were saved. What year was that? If you don’t know off the top of your head, reflect for a moment. How old were you? Who were you with? Which person had the most impact on your coming to faith? OK, now what year was it? Here’s what I want you to

do. I want us all to write the year of our conversion in the air. OK, arm raised. Ready, write the year of your salvation. That was the time that you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our salvation, until we acquire possession of it. You are marked, sealed, forgiven, rescued, redeemed, renewed, reconciled, regenerated...saved. That's joy.

A similar joy happens when you witness others submit their hearts to Christ. I'll say it again—baptism services are some of the best places to experience this joy. We don't routinely recount our testimony to others. We probably should do more of it. Some are dramatic. Some are less so but the miracle of salvation is always the same. Does this bring you joy? Paul fondly remembered the first convert in Asia—the beloved Epaenatus. Ministry is hard but ministry is joy. I trust you know this joy.

Dedicated Servants—who has worked hard for you

Several of those whom Paul greeted were called workers or fellow workers but Mary was called a hard worker.

One of Karen's living heroes is Jill Briscoe. The Briscoes are in their 80's but still regularly travel the world speaking to small and large crowds and getting their hands dirty for the Lord. I was at a conference where Stuart was asked how he balanced ministry and family life. His simple answer was that you don't. Active ministry never really balances with endless time for family, but their family also brought their family with them into ministry. All three of their children are in vocational ministry of some kind so it seemed to work out well. That's why I love to see families serving together in the nursery, Children's Church, worship team, cleaning the church, etc.

Stuart and Jill Briscoe also have this little saying when one of them is getting word out. They ask the other, "Are you weary in well doing?" Jill writes...

"Many a time as I tumble into bed, my preacher husband, weary himself, reaches over to welcome me with a kiss of comfort. "Welcome home, little girl," he says. "I know you are weary in well doing, but doesn't that feel sort of good?" And you know, it really does! A journey with Jesus is not an easy thing. You won't get to your destination without sand in your sandals and dirt in your hair, but you will have the incalculable joy of His company. His abundant sympathy and His "Well done" at the end of the day will be worth it all."¹

If you work hard to try to earn God's favor, then you are clearly working for the wrong reasons and will burn out. But if you work hard out of the overflow of grace, then you are likely to keep going and keep growing.

Shared Suffering

In verse seven, Adronicus and Junia are recounted as Paul's "fellow prisoners". I haven't been in prison nor have I experienced a great deal of suffering. But I do agree with John Piper when he says that suffering happens in community. "The church is not meant to be a loosely bound association of functional Lone Rangers. Paul confronts that type of thinking when he writes, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

The church is meant to be a refuge for those suffering. When a member is hurting, the church applies the bandages; when a member is down, the church encourages; when a member is in need, the church comes alongside to help.”²

Paul suffered more than most Christians ever will. If you don't believe me, go read 2 Corinthians chapter eleven. But suffering was made easier when it was shared with fellow believers. When you go through something like this with someone else, you will never forget it.

Faithful Leadership

Adronicus and Junia were also “well known to the apostles.” They were well known for their ministry but the fact that they were well known may have indicated that they were leaders themselves. Regardless, the apostles were the leaders of Paul's day. Gospel ministry needs good leaders.

Please pray for the Call Committee tomorrow and Tuesday. We have narrowed 150 profiles down to 7 and each of these are being interviewed the next 2 days over Skype. Pray that we ask good questions. Pray that we are of one mind. Pray that we start to narrow down to the one whom God has chosen for us. A good and Godly leader. In these days when pastors and Christian leaders are succumbing to evils such as Ashley Madison, the need for strong character is all the greater. When it comes to leadership, character will always trump giftedness, so please pray for us.

Nurturing Love

No one names their child Rufus these days but what stands out most about Rufus was his mother whom Paul said “has been a mother to me as well.” Paul never mentioned his own parents. We know he was raised a strict Pharisee so he no doubt was reared in that environment. Maybe his parents had died by the time he was converted. Maybe they rejected Paul and his radical faith. We don't know. But we do know that there was a nurturing woman who was like a Christian mother to him. And when he wrote this, Paul was probably in his late fifties. He was getting to be an old man but he still needed the nurturing love and support of a mother figure.

Moms, don't ever give up on your kids, no matter their age. They need you.

Small Groups

Priscilla and Aquilla had a church that met in their house. But theirs was not unique. This was the pattern for churches everywhere. This was the pattern of the early church.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:46-47).

This is one area that has been lacking in our church over the years. You don't have to be in a small group to grow in your faith but you do need something that has the components of a small group. Do you have fellowship? Do you have folks who are regularly spurring you on in the faith? Do you have anyone to whom you are accountable?

By the way, I sort of don't like that phrase "are you accountable to anyone?" I don't care for it because it sends a confusing message. If you are a believer, then you are, by definition, accountable to every other believer. What you do affects the guy sitting next to you. You are accountable to him or her whether or not you have some kind of mutual agreement between you. If you leave your husband or your wife, do you think that affects the rest of us? If you take steps of faith this year and trust God for something you have never trusted him with before, don't you think that will have a positive impact on the body? Whether or not you are formally part of a small group, you are part of the body of Christ. This is not just to rebuke you and have people keep their eye on you, but it is for your good. It's a matter of a loving body helping its own.

Honoring Women

There are six or seven women on this list. Many outside the church say that Christianity squashes women. You don't have to look far to hear this sentiment. And folks who say this are especially hard on Paul. These people like Jesus but they hate Paul. In their opinion, Paul is a misogynist—a woman hater.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible clearly teaches that men and women have different roles—in the home, in marriage and to a small degree, in the church. But the Bible honors women at every turn. Paul reserves some of his most endearing greetings for the women on this list. In most churches and on the mission field, the women are usually more involved than men in keeping ministry moving. They should be thanked and honored for their service.

All of these things are necessary for the body to be working properly—as each one does its part. Are you an active part of the body of Christ?

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¹ http://www.justbetweenus.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=173271

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-truths-about-christian-suffering>