

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation

TITLE: We Need Each Other

SCRIPTURE: Romans 16:1-16

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PASTOR: Jim Thompson

The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

Romans 16 is like the exclamation point at the end of the sentence that is Romans. But how? Paul lists 26 names in 16 verses, and simply tells the Roman church to greet these individuals. Doesn't that feel like an anticlimactic conclusion to one of the most influential texts in the history of the western world? Additionally, most of these names they are never mentioned in the rest of the Bible, which makes this passage ever more strange and distant. So, how do we make sense of all these names? Paul is too intentional in his writings for this to be arbitrary; what's he trying to communicate in this passage?

Well, first of all, Paul knows how important people are. As C. S. Lewis says, "You've never met a mere mortal." But beyond this, Paul is talking about the actual people in our everyday lives. Their significance to us (and ours to them) can hardly be overstated. And in order to remind his friends in Rome about this, he lists all of these names so that they'll have to take a deep breath and consider how important people are in God's plans. God never intended relationship with him to be a solo project or a self-help journey.

Also, Paul's list a great example of how to see people in light of the gospel. He consistently defines people as a "servant of the Lord," or my "fellow co-workers in Christ," or "chosen in the Lord," or "beloved in the Lord," or "approved in Christ." And in defining people this way, he is attempting to see them as God sees them.

One of the most unique things about Paul's list in Romans 16 is how different all of the people are. There are 26 names, 8 women and 18 men. Some are slave names; some are Jewish names; some are Gentile names, and some are husband and wife teams. And it would've been a shock in his first-century context, but Paul is unashamed about how helpful women have been in his personal ministry. He even begins the chapter with Phoebe the deacon (16:1-2), who was likely the one to deliver the letter to Rome. But all of these differences add up to and further prove the point that...

Our ongoing need for Jesus includes an ongoing need for each other.

We need each other. That's what Paul's list proves. But not in a vague way. We need each other because we need Jesus. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (3:23), and now we can all be a part of his family and indwelt with the Spirit (chapters 4-8). Meaning, our unity with Jesus includes unity with one another, and Romans 16 is a snapshot of that.

This list of names that may feel distant to us is a concrete reminder that to the Roman church that Christianity in isolation is not Christianity at all. Rather, Christian community is the soil in which theology, doxology, and unity should be planted and grown. Spiritual maturity with God entails relational maturity with other believers. Community is not a good Darwinian idea that can help us along. Community is the ideal. It's Edenic. It's the New Creation beginning to blossom. And this means that we should practice now what we will know for all time – happy and unhindered shalom with God and others. Paul knows that these names are relational hooks on which the church should hang everything else he's said in Romans, and Paul believes that if we get the gospel, we will get that we need each other.

For Discussion —

1. In your own life, where do you sense your greatest need for community?
2. Explain in your own words how our need for Jesus entails a need for each other.
3. Personally, what stood out to you the most about this message?
4. Name five people that have shown you what life with God and each other is supposed to look like.
5. Could your name ever be found on a list like the one in Romans 16? Are you giving yourself away to such an extent people can't help but be thankful for your life?