

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Not to Be Forgotten

Transcribed Message
April 14, 2024
Romans 16:5-16

There are about five weeks left in the school year. I see various responses on your faces. Some of you are smiling. Some of you are sad. I won't identify who is smiling and who is sad, but about five weeks to go. I don't know if it's still a tradition, but I am thinking that it is about time for the yearbook to come out here in the next few weeks. If that tradition still holds true, back in the day we would pass our yearbooks among our classmates. There would be different notes and comments. Sometimes they would be silly and funny. In some cases, it would be something serious. Sometimes the comments would be something that everybody knew about. Sometimes they would be something that maybe just a few people know about. When we come to Romans 16, I almost feel like Paul's got the church directory from Rome before him and it's almost like he's flipping through, and he is writing notes by the pictures of various people. Maybe some of the things that he writes are known to just a few of the people there. Other things probably are known by many of them. But it's a rather fascinating ending as we come to this last chapter of Romans.

We look this morning at verses 5 through 16 and it's Paul's Who's Who of the people in the church in Rome. I want to just look at these verses and these people through this lens and simply say to us again: whoever you are, and maybe wherever you are and wherever you go, you and I are in service and ministry for Jesus Christ. That's the calling that God has put on all our lives. Whatever it is that we're doing vocationally, we need to see ourselves as being in the ministry because all of us are in the ministry of serving the body of Christ and the world that God has placed in. we're on this mission to go and make disciples.

Let's look at Romans 16 this last chapter regarding this section. Remember a few weeks ago I said all of Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Even a list of names is a part of what God wants us to glean from and learn from. There are some fascinating

things I think in these verses as we look at them this morning. Let's start off with just a quick overview and hit some numbers. This is the day of analytics. I suppose it's in all kinds of things, but in sports everything is analytically analyzed. Everything is based on numbers. We're going to do some analytics here in Romans 16 to start off and here's what we see. There are 27 people mentioned by name. 27 people are mentioned by name. 19 men and 8 women. We've said this repeatedly now. Paul had a deep appreciation for the role of women within the church and he elevates them and lifts them up. This would be very unusual in the 1st century for someone to be writing and to call out and lift up and identify the women who were a part of what was going on. But that's what Paul does here. Other people are going to be mentioned.

Secondly, there are 21 different titles here regarding how he describes them. All kinds of different ways. Sister, brother, servant, saints. We'll see as we go through the different words that Paul uses to describe these 27 people and the others that he mentions here.

Then lastly, 18 greetings are given regarding Paul calling out somebody. 18 different references to greetings. Many of the scholars of the New Testament and especially in particular obviously the book of Romans think that of these 18 different times that he sends greetings that he is really identifying house churches or what were called tenement churches. If there was a house that wasn't big enough to hold the people that were meeting, they would meet in another place. It wasn't a church building, but it would be a place where they would gather. It's possible that in this vast city of Rome, there wasn't just one church. Obviously, there were many and maybe there were as many as 18, maybe more than that. But Paul here is mindful of those that he's writing to.

Then let's just do a little bit of a deeper dive and look at a couple of other things. As we go through this list and we've already seen this and we'll see it again, but there's great diversity. There's great diversity in the body of Christ. We've already said there's 19 men that are named. There's 8 women. There are going to be Jews in this group. There are Gentiles. There are going to be people obviously who are free. You're going to see people who we think are slaves that Paul mentions and writes about. There are those that are evidently married and those that are single. You see within the body of

Christ the beauty and the diversity that God has designed, whether that's ethnic, social, economic, gender. There's diversity. That's God's design. God's design is not that we all look and act and talk and sound alike. God loves for there to be great variety. We know that that's going to be the case in glory and so we should be welcoming that and embracing that diversity that God has built into the church.

Secondly, the primary identity that ties all these people together. All 27 of them have this one thing in common. They're all said to be Christ followers. They're Christ followers. It is Galatians 3:28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, but you are all one in Christ Jesus. It is 1 Corinthians 12:13. Again, he's underscoring that there's not Jew or Greek, or bond or free. Everyone has been baptized by one Spirit into the body of Christ. It simply underscores for us again what God has intended. They are in Christ, Paul says, or they are in the Lord. That was true of the church in Rome. Everybody that he mentions is either in Christ or not in Christ. That's true this morning. Everybody here. There are just two categories. You're either in Christ or not in Christ. that's the reality that as Paul writes to this church the thing that holds all of them together, and this phrase that it is so common in Paul's letters, is in Christ, in the Lord. That's so significant. The gospel is heard. It's embraced. It's believed. You're brought into Christ. You are brought into this spiritual body of Christ. This mystical union that all of us share in that's tighter, as we said last week, than any earthly relationship. That's what he's been speaking of.

Thirdly, he will underscore the language of love and family all through this closing set of verses. It is all about the love that you have for each other and this sense of family throughout. As we go through these names, just look for these kinds of things that the fact that people are important to Paul. That's something we've underscored since we jumped into this section. People are important to Paul. He is using names. He's calling them out in that way. You see that even though they may not be known by anybody else, and they may not even be known by that many people within their gathering. The point is they could be behind-the-scenes. Their ministry might never be public, never seen. But what Paul is saying to us here is it is vitally important. Your ministry may be behind-the-scenes. People don't get to see what you do week to week on a regular basis. But I tell you God sees it, and it is vitally important to the life and

ministry of the church. That's a part of what he wants us to see here. We need each other. We need each other. I think this shows just the sweetness of Christian love and fellowship. That's what he's underscoring I think in all this section.

Let's jump in to this Who's Who of the church in Rome and I want to draw your attention to two things and then we will look at these names. But the first thing I want you to see is simply it's important enough to name. Important enough to name. I know one thing is true of all of us. Everybody enjoys having their name heard, their name called, their name mentioned. That is something that encourages us. I can remember in graduate school in seminary. It was not until my second year and the second semester that I had a professor call me by my first name. Second year, second semester I'm sitting in Greek exegesis of Ephesians, which is a class I didn't really want him to know my name, but he calls my name and says Carlon, why don't you do verse 14. Oh great! You know my name. I've been here over a year and a half and this is the first professor to use my name. When I graduated, I told him, I said Dr. Fanning, you probably have no recollection of this. I know you don't. but it was in your class my second-year second semester that a professor called me by my name. That's what Paul's doing here. He's lifting people up. He's calling their name. He has already talked about Phoebe. He talked about Prisca and Aquila.

Now we come to Epanetus, Verse 5. He says: "Greet my beloved Epanetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia." Here's this idea of family. It is not just loved. It is my beloved. Say a word of greeting to my beloved Epanetus. He's my dear friend. He's my close friend. In fact, he says he's the first convert in Asia. When we hear the word Asia, we think of China and Japan and Thailand and Vietnam and all that part of the world. That's not part of the world Paul's talking about. He's talking about what is modern-day Turkey. As you think of Asia and the first convert, here it is in fact this man Epanetus who is from what we think of is modern-day Turkey and he is the first convert to Christ. Paul says something about this matter in the end of 1 Corinthian 16 when he says in verse 15, "Now I urge you brothers, you know that the household of Stefanos were the first converts in Achaia and that they devoted themselves to the service of the saints." Achaia is this area of Asia and evidently Epanetus is in fact a part of the family of Stefanos. He's the first one Paul remembers. That is something significant. You go

into an area of ministry and you're sharing the gospel, somebody hears and believes. You don't forget that. The first time that you are all allowed by the Holy Spirit to be that impactful in bringing the gospel into somebody's life, you remember. Paul remembers that that was this man.

The second greeting is Mary in verse 6. "Greet Mary who has worked hard for you." there's lots of Marys in the Bible. There isn't any reason to think that this Mary is one of the previous Marys that we've encountered, for instance in the Gospels. But here what is said of her there's no title specifically, but she is said to be a hard worker. She has worked hard for you. Paul likes this word. He is going to use it again in this section, but he uses it in other places. It is a word that speaks of working to the point of exhaustion. It's the idea of toiling to the point of exhaustion. Can you imagine it being said of you that you toil, and you work to the point of exhaustion in your ministry in the church? That's Mary. That's what he says about her. She's a hard worker. She pours her life into the life of the church. She is probably one of those people who simply sees the need and moves to meet the need. She doesn't go ask somebody if this should be taken care of. She just sees the need and she ministers, and she toils, and she works hard. What a testimony this is to the church at Rome.

The third in your outline: Andronicus and Junia. Verse 7: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsman and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me." Paul says quite a bit about these two individuals. The first thing he says is they are fellow Jews. They've come to Christ. At some point they've realized that Jesus is the Messiah, Yeshua. He is the promised one. Just like Paul they have moved from being involved in Judaism to Christianity. They have come to Christ. Somewhere, we don't know where they were, but they were in fact in prison with Paul. What an amazing thing. He's writing to the church at Rome. He is in Corinth. He knows they're now living in Rome, and he says remember Andronicus and Junia. We spent time together in jail. Again, we don't know when that was. somewhere their paths crossed. We said last week Paul was either in a riot, going to a riot, or coming out of a riot. He was either in prison, going to prison, or coming out of prison. That's Paul's missionary experience. Somewhere their lives crossed paths in prison no less.

Then he says they're well-known. Look at that phrase. They are well known to the apostles. That little phrase again has become the point of a lot of things that have been written and here's why. It could be translated they're well-known among the apostles. They are prominent among the apostles. They are esteemed among the apostles. There are some questions we need to step into here. The first one is this. Who are these people in terms of their gender for instance. Are these two men? Andronicus and Junia. Or is this a man and woman? Are they in fact maybe a husband and wife? Those questions percolate because we don't honestly know with a dogmatic answer how to answer that question. If you have a New American Standard Bible, you'll see that it is Junius. There's an S at the end of that name. That's also the case in the early NIV translation. The NIV translation later changes it to Junia and returns it to the feminine form and says that they are outstanding among the apostles, literally translating that they're apostles as well. The ESV, which is the one that we're teaching out of, has it also in the feminine form. At the end of the day, whichever these two positions you choose, whether this is a man or a woman, the textual evidence just is not strong enough on either side to say dogmatically this is in fact a man or this is a woman. I think it's a husband and wife.

Clearly, they are not apostles with a big A, because there were 12 of those, and then Matthias and then Paul. But the word apostle is used of others with a small "a" and in that sense it means a sent one. That's all the word *apostolos* is – a sent one. It's in what we would think of even as a missionary today. It's very possible that they were highly esteemed. They were looked at among the apostles as being ones who have been sent by God. That is something that you can think about and look at and decide for yourself. But I lean towards the view that this is a husband and wife.

The last thing he says about them is they were in Christ before me. Paul was saved about 33 AD. He was walking on the road to Damascus. That takes us very close to the life of Christ. If they're saved before him, is he hinting at the possibility that maybe they were saved on the day of Pentecost? Maybe they were a part of that gathering of thousands of people in Jerusalem. When the Spirit of God through Peter's preaching was given thousands of people in the course of those early days came to Christ. Maybe

Andronicus and Junia were a part of that. That's a conversation that we'll look forward to in heaven.

The next one is Ampliatus. Verse 8. "Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord." Again, just my beloved of the Lord. This is a very common name among slaves. It's very possible that Paul is writing to a man who is serving as a slave in some setting in the city of Rome. Remember, slaves were doctors, teachers, accountants, project managers. Sometimes they were household servants. There's a whole wide variety but he was not a free man evidently if that in fact is who this individual is.

The fifth couple of people on your outline are Urbanus and Stachys. Verse 9. "Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys, our fellow workers." All we know about these two is what is said here. That, as we've said, is true of many of these names. They're never mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. No other information is given to us but here they are. I thought about this this week as I was putting these thoughts together. At what point did they realize that their names are recorded in Scripture? It is not likely that when they were in the city of Rome and they get this letter from Paul, they don't necessarily know. Certainly, the books of the New Testament aren't being collected yet, so there wasn't any certainty. They didn't say, okay, our name is now in the book of Romans which is going to be in the New Testament Scriptures. They didn't have that much information at that point. It may not be until they got to glory and somebody came up to Urbanus and said Urbanus, it's good to meet you. I read about you in Romans 16.

The sixth group of people are Appelles and the family of Aristabulus. Verse 10. "Greet Appelles who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus." Look at this. This is a fascinating thing. Appelles is said to be one who is approved in Christ. That means he was tested in Christ. He was tried in Christ. He was genuine. It reminds me when James talks in the first chapter and verse 12, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him." 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul says be an approved workman, a tested workmen. not ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. There is one sense in which every believer is approved. God looks at you and there isn't anything that you can do to improve your approval rating

before God. That is true of our position in Christ. But it isn't true that every believer is going to stand before the Lord and Matthew 25 is going to be said. Well done, good and faithful servant. That is not necessarily going to be said of everybody. That's why Jesus taught what he did. Strive to be approved. How do we do that? Through obedience. Here is Appelles. He is a man who is approved. His character has been tested and tried, and he awaits the day that the Lord will say well done, good and faithful servant.

We live in a culture that is hostile to Christianity. It is increasingly so. Some of you I know already are experiencing this, but I believe many more of us are going to face in the future, especially those of you that are younger, you're going to be in context over a whole variety of issues that our culture is very confused about. You're going to have to determine whether you're going to fly your flag for Christ or not, whether you're going to take a stand that is courageous and bold and declare that you're a Christ follower or not. That's exactly what he is saying about Appelles here. He's that kind of guy. There was a boldness of spirit about him that put him in that category. That is a beautiful thing.

And then of Aristobulus. He doesn't greet Aristobulus. He doesn't greet him, but he says greet his household. Here's the thing. There's a man named Aristobulus who is said in ancient literature to be the grandson of King Herod. Remember King Herod? He issued the decree that every baby boy under two was to be killed following the birth of Christ. This could very well be that man's grandson. He lives in Rome. He is a part of the Imperial power structure, and he has a household of slaves. Within that household, he says to greet his probably slaves that are in his household. It just reminds us again of what we've just said of the challenges. I wonder if he doesn't name them because they're in this place that could be challenging if their names were to be known. If this document were to fall into somebody else's hands, that maybe wouldn't be productive and helpful for the slaves to be called out as Christ followers because they're perhaps serving a man who is powerful and wealthy within the city of Rome. But here is a reminder to us again. The challenges. Some of you are in marriages where you have a spouse who either isn't a believer or who really doesn't care at all about spiritual things. That's hard. That's a challenge. That's the people he's greeting here. They probably are in a context that living out their faith is something that they deal with in terms of the

challenges every day. Think of young people who have parents who have no interest, no desire for spiritual things.

I was at Sam's yesterday, picking up a couple things. and not very far from me comes this family, a young family – a dad, who was a big guy, a mom carrying a baby, and probably a four-year-old boy walking behind. The little boy is crying, and I can see that. It didn't take long to know why he was crying. I don't know what led up to it, but this dad is dropping every verbal assault on this little four-year-old boy, including mixing in words that we never used to even think of, let alone say in public. He is just bombing this little kid. I wanted to go over to that little guy and give him a hug. I couldn't help but think what is this kid going to be doing in 15 years? He's got a dad who's hurting and who's hurting him in ways that must be painful. It's got to be hard to forget what your dad in public is saying to you and about you. Then I wanted to go over and either ask the guy if I could pray for him, or more likely punch him in the nose. But I didn't want to be in the news Saturday evening for a local pastor arrested for beating up a very big man. It could've been a different story line. But that's it. There are folks here among us who are living this as children, as teenagers, and adults where you're in not a supportive environment. Many of us are and we don't want to take that for granted. These people I don't think were. I don't think they were in a supportive environment.

Look at the next one. Number seven. Herodian and the family of Narcissus. Verse 11. "Greet my kinsman Herodian." He's a fellow Jew. That's all he says. "Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus." That would be a hard name to grow up with. We don't know if his parents were prophetic or what the deal was there but anyway.

Number 8. There are 3 women. Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis. Verse 12. "Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis who has worked hard in the Lord." These are possibly sisters like Mary and Martha. Their names mean dainty and delicate. Dainty and delicate did not sit around and do doilies. Dainty and delicate were doers. They were workers. Same idea here as was said about Mary. They toiled. They worked hard. Look at that statement regarding Persis, the end of verse 12. What is different about that statement about her? She has worked hard in the Lord. What is different about that? Past tense. She has. Maybe she's

at a point in her life where she can't do what she was doing and yet Paul still lifts her up. He still acknowledges she's poured her life out. She can't do it in the way that she did before. Who knows, maybe she was a founding member of one of these groups and poured her life out in that way.

Number nine is Rufus and his mother. Verse 13. "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and also his mother who has been a mother to me as well." Rufus is mentioned in Mark 15 and verse 21. While Jesus is carrying his cross to Golgotha, he can't carry it anymore. He falls under the load. the soldiers see a man named Simon of Cyrene and they conscript him into duty, and they make Simon carry the cross the rest of the way. Simon had two sons. Their names were Rufus and Alexander. It is very likely this is Rufus, the son of Simon. I have a thinking that Simon, so captured by the man that he was carrying the cross for, stayed and watched the events of the crucifixion, came to Christ in that time frame of the preaching of the gospel, and his two sons Alexander and Rufus come to Christ because of his influence and influence of his mother. I think that's a strong case because the Gospel of Mark, in which their names are mentioned, is written in the city of Rome to the believers, the Gentiles in Rome. That was the purpose of Mark's writing the Gospel of Mark in the city of Rome to Gentiles. Notice what he says. He says your mother was a mother to me too. Somewhere along the way, Rufus's mother nurtured and took Paul under her wings and was an influence in his life too.

Then the 10th group in verse 14. "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers who are with them." This is a fraternity group of some kind. Maybe a fraternity group in the Lord. It's a men's small group. This speaks to the value of being in a big group like we are and the value of being in a small group. Sometimes it's good to be in a mixed small group. Sometimes it's good to be in a gender specific small group. Those were these guys.

Look at verse 15. "Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, his sister and Olympas and all the saints who are with them." This is thought to be a family unit. There's a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, and then there's some guy hanging out at their house named Olympas. Paul thought of all of these people, and he couldn't help but give thanks for them. It is just this beautiful picture, isn't it, of the church in action and the diversity of the church and the health of the church and the life of the church.

One pastor that was commenting on these things said as the elders and pastors think of the church and they review the names, as they go through the directory, he asked this question of his body and I ask it of you. When they come to your name, does a smile come to their face, or is there a sigh? Are you an encourager in the life of the church? Or do you bring grief? Are you a blessing to the body? Or do you tend to be burdensome? Paul's looking at a group of people. I'm looking at a group of people. I'm thankful that I can say this is a group of people encouraging each other, blessing each other, lifting each other up. 27 names and Paul is smiling about every one of them.

Look at this last verse. Loved enough to welcome with a holy kiss. Verse 16. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." This practice of the holy kiss is mentioned five times in the New Testament. They're listed for you there on your outline. Four of them are by Paul. One of them is by Peter. It is this practice that still exists in many parts of the world. We're familiar with what we see when that happens. My own personal experience with the holy kiss was a little bit traumatic. We were with a small group of guys – Jack, Bob, me, and Jim – were in Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova for about a month. In a little village in Ukraine, I was introduced to a pastor. He had to be in his 80s. he was a man short of stature and looked like he had weathered a lot in his life. As he was being introduced to me, it was mentioned that he had served like 20 years in prison for preaching the gospel. I'm just engaged with this guy. I'm looking at this guy and appreciating his ministry, all that he's gone through compared to my life and my world. I mean, here's a man who spent 20 some years in prison for the gospel. Jim had told us when we went some different things that we should follow. he said if you don't want to receive the holy kiss, just make sure your hand is out there ahead of time because if you have your hand out there they'll just shake your hand and they won't come in for the holy kiss. I guess it was because I was just taken in with this man's testimony and story that I failed to get a hand out there and before I know it, he's coming in for the holy kiss. I zipped and he zagged, and I think I should have zagged, and he should have zipped. But we met right in the middle, right on the old liperooskis. and that was my experience with the holy kiss. I said it was somewhat traumatic. I walked around the rest of the time with my hand out..

What does Paul mean when he says greet one another with a holy kiss? What do we do with that? I think he would say to us do what is culturally appropriate in your setting to express genuine love, genuine concern, a real heart for each other. Most often in our culture that's a handshake. It is certainly appropriate to gender for a hug. That's something that we have to be mindful of in our culture and I think in every culture. I think that's what Paul would say to us. I think it's also that the idea that he says this four times in his letters. It should be a rebuke to us if we don't have that kind of expression and love and concern for each other. It clearly is a rebuke to us if we see somebody and avoid them. This verse speaks to that because he's basically saying as you come together as the people of God, there should be a sense of welcome among you. There should be real love, real concern. It should be visible. It should be demonstrative. You should see it. You should know that that is there for each other. This is a gathered community where we welcome everybody that comes through these doors because we want them to experience what we have experienced by way of the gospel.

Here we are. Wherever we are, wherever we go, that is to be understood as our place of service and ministry for Jesus Christ. Go and make disciples. This chapter to me is a chapter of disciple makers. That's what these people are doing. Some of them are working behind the scenes in support. Others are no doubt out in front doing their thing. But everybody's working together in the hearing of the gospel and the training of the people to walk with Christ.

What do we take away? I want you to take this question with you. don't try to answer in just this moment. I want you to take these two questions. If Paul were to write a letter to the church at Covenant and your name was mentioned, what would be said about you? What would be said about you? Maybe add to that, what would you want it to say? There are some wonderful things said about the believers there in Rome.

Here's the one thing that I would want to have said about everybody here this morning –that you and I are all in Christ. We're in the Lord. That is the defining issue. All of the other descriptors and all of the other comments are encouraging and uplifting, but ultimately, fundamentally, the most important one is are you in Christ this morning. Maybe that language is not familiar to you so let me just put it this way. Has there ever

been a point in your life where in hearing the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ -- that Christ came to this earth, lived a perfect life, died a terrible death, was raised from the dead, and he did that for you, and he did that for me. The Bible says that we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There isn't any way that you can gain the glory of heaven. There isn't any way that you can gain the hope of eternal life by working. It certainly is not by sitting in this building. It is not by being baptized. It is not by giving money. It is not by being nice to your neighbor. It is not 100 other good things. They're all good. They're just not avenues to heaven. There is only one way to heaven, and it is through the cross of Christ. There's only one way for you to be certain that you are in the Lord and in Christ and that is you've heard that good news and you believed it for yourself. You've said I believe that Jesus gives to me eternal life when I put my trust and faith in him alone.

Let's pray. Father God, may it be said of every one of us here this morning that we are in Christ, that we are in the Lord, that we know you in a personal way because of what Jesus your Son has done for us on the cross. Lord, I pray if that certainty does not reside in the heart of anyone hearing and listening and watching this morning, that right now your Holy Spirit would convince, urge, call, bring them to understand and embrace and believe this good news of the gospel, that they would inherit the gift of eternal life, have their sins forgiven and experience the joy of what it will be like to live with you forever. Father God, please call those that you would draw to yourself through Jesus in these moments. We pray in Christ's name, amen.