Romans 16:1-16 Sermon Manuscript

“A Faith That Leads to Obedience”

 People have a tendency to separate and divorce doctrine from love. People have a tendency to assume that love and theology are at odds with each other. They picture the seminarian who is adamant about theology and who loves to argue about theology as someone who tends to lack love and lack a desire to have close personal relationships. Often the thought of emphasizing “doctrine” is seen as divisive and unloving. And often it goes the other way where people tend to believe that those who are good at love and loving others, and who are good at forming close personal relationships with others are those who are not typically don’t emphasis doctrinal precision and correctness. It is unfortunate that we often think of those two categories as mutually exclusive, when in reality they are not mutually exclusive, but mutually inclusive…meaning that they both compliment one another, and moreover, you can’t have one without the other. To truly love others and love other saints in the body of Christ, you need to know sound doctrine because that is what is going to enable you to love and serve other fellow believers in the most God honoring way possible. And if you know sound doctrine, that should lead you to love, adore, and worship God even more and to love His people.

 We might think that the Apostle Paul doesn’t strike us as being the most loving or affectionate person with all his heavy doctrine and theology that he has presented to us in the book of Romans. But that cannot be further from the truth as we will see more of his personal relational side coming out here in the end of this powerful letter he has written. And he will show us his affection for the saints in Rome not just for the sake of showing affection, but because the faith that he has received from God, has led what he has called in the book of Romans as “the obedience of faith.” And that “obedience of faith” is now demonstrated in Paul’s own life in the way he addresses the saints in Rome. And the whole goal of the book of Romans dear friends has been to lead you to have a faith that leads to obedience to Jesus Christ. Because after all, what does the book of James teach in regard to our faith? That faith without works is what???....Dead! The heat of the sun alone warms our earth. Yet the sun is never alone because it is constantly conjoined with light. In the same way, it is faith alone that saves, but that faith that saves is never alone. Genuine saving faith always brings forth the fruit of obedience.

 And my friends, sadly, there have been in the history of the church and are there those currently who are attending churches all around the world who don’t possess this kind of faith. They have a head knowledge of the facts of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but it stops there inside the head and never penetrates to the heart. Yes we must first understand what the gospel is. We must have the match. But that match must be lit by the spark of Jesus’ love.

What Christ wants are not just people who claim they have faith, but those who demonstrate the genuineness of their faith by their obedience to Him. That’s why Jesus our Lord said to the disciples in the Great Commission in Matthew 28 to make “disciples.” He didn’t say to “go into all the world and make “converts” or “go into all the world and make people who acknowledge by profession Jesus’ death and resurrection…but go into all the world and make “DISCIPLES”! What do disciples do? They imitate their master, they obey their master, they follow their master and His ways. That’s what a disciple does. You can almost add and change it to this, “*go into all the world and make disciples who are obedient to the faith*…” And this aspect of obedience and discipleship is further reinforced by Jesus in that Great Commission that as we make disciples of Jesus, we are to “*teach them to observe everything that Jesus has commanded us*.” You can’t teach someone to observe everything that Jesus commands of us in one off the wall gospel conversation. No, teaching disciples to observe everything that Jesus commands takes time, effort, and intentionality from the whole church. It requires that initial gospel proclamation but afterwards it involves teaching them to be in relationship to other believers, it involves an exchanging of numbers, meeting up at a coffee shop to discuss difficult doctrines and topics, being accountable to someone older and more mature in the faith, and being involved in the various ministries that the local church offers so that we can carry out the “one another” commands that are in Scripture (“love one another, admonish one another, carry one another’s burdens, encourage one another”).

 So what does a faith leading to obedience to Jesus look like? Let’s begin in verse 1 of chapter 16: “*Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a benefactor of many, and of myself as well*.” Out of the over almost 30 names mentioned in these first 15 verses, Phoebe received the most commendation and words from the Apostle Paul. Why is that? Well, ultimately we don’t know for sure other than that she was a faithful Christian and judging by the choice of words describing her as a “benefactor,” she most likely was a wealthy businesswoman who used her influence and wealth to serve the church. Most believe that Phoebe was likely the person who delivered this epistle to the Romans. And as a result, she had an extremely important role.

 And then we see the rest of Paul’s command to greet those mentioned from verses 3 through 16 “*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. Greet Mary, who has labored much for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding to the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, laborers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

 Now we could spend some time going over each name and what we know of that name…but for the sake of time, I want you to see the bigger picture that despite not meeting many if not most of these people face to face, Paul still loves them and has something good to say about them. Notice the descriptions “*beloved in the Lord*,” “*our fellow worker in Christ*,” the “*approved in Christ*,” “*laborers in the Lord*,” describing the affection he has for Rufus’ mother like a son to his own mother… “*his mother and mine*.” Paul knew enough about these Roman believers to be able to summarize their character in a couple of words. The challenge to us is do we know each other, whom we do see and come in contact with every Sunday? Do you know enough about someone’s life that if someone were to point to a random person in the congregation, that you can say “So and so, he is beloved in the Lord…” “So and so…he is a hard worker and loves to serve God’s people, etc.”

 One of the things I hated about being at Grace Community Church which had about 6000-7000 people going to if you combine the duplicate morning services and the evening service, was that on Sunday morning you would see waves upon waves of thousands upon thousands of people walking through that campus and I don’t recognize them, I don’t know their names, what they do in life and why they are here. I mean that’s the reality of being at any megachurch that it’s hard to know people and be known by other people. Sure, I had my Bible study that I was apart of that had about 80 people or so, and then I really knew my small group that I was leading with the 4 or 5 guys in it, but that was about it. You can meet a guy for the first time there, introduce yourself saying “I’ve never seen you around before, are you new here to Grace?” And the person responds “No, I’m not new, I’ve been going here for 10 years now…are you new here?” What???!! You know I think many people go to megachurches as opposed to a small church like this church because they like to stay under the radar. They like going to service and hearing the preaching and maybe because they get to sit and hang out with their friends at church, but they don’t want other people to try to get to know them. At a megachurch, it’s very easy to sit at a different spot every Sunday so you decrease the chance of someone getting to know you because to them they don’t know if you are just visiting or committed to the church.

 But another important detail I want you to notice from this list of names is how everyone listed is involved in some way, shape, or form in serving the church. Like verse 6, “*Greet Mary, who has “labored much for you*” or verse 3 “*Greet Prisca and Aquila who for my life risked their own necks*.” From young to old, Paul was pleased to know that everyone was contributing their time, talents, and giftings to the upbuilding of the body of Christ and the exaltation of the gospel. There is no such thing as benchwarmers in the body of Christ. You’re not called to sit on the sidelines because you are not good enough to play and those who are playing are playing because they deserve to be on that court. No, no, no, this ain’t sports. If you are a true believer in Christ, God has gifted you in some way to serve the church. Peter breaks down our spiritual gifts into two simple categories. You are either gifted with a “speaking” related gift or a “serving” related gift. Not to say God can’t grant both to believers, but God has granted you a gift in at least one of those categories.

 Listen to 1 Peter 4:10-11 “*As each one has received a gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God—whoever speaks, as one speaking the oracles of God; whoever serves, as one serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and might forever and ever. Amen*.” And we are to serve not only because it’s our duty as believers to employ the various gifts that God has given to us, but also we are to serve because we should be loving each other. And that’s why verse 16 says “*Greet one another with a holy kiss*.” During that culture, a holy kiss was a kiss on the cheek or the forehead, usually not the lips. That was an ancient custom back in those days. Even today, some cultures still practice greeting one another with a kiss. Some Latin cultures and some middle eastern culture still do this. We don’t greet one another with a holy kiss because we live in America. But something to that equivalent would be a hug maybe. Whatever form it may come in, we are to show the affection of Christ to one another.

 Paul was never for a moment a professional Christian. Paul did not write all this doctrine that we see in this magnificent letter because he was a professional theologian, though he did teach as a professor of theology and of the Scriptures in the school of Tyrannus in the book of Acts. No what drove him to expound on Christ and His atonement was His love for the Savior and His love for you and me. There is no such thing as professional Christianity. I think pastors and professors are most vulnerable to this snare of treating the Christian faith in a business and professional like way. That’s why seminaries and Bible colleges can be a dangerous place to be, because the Bible is often treated as a piece of literature that is bowed down to the inspections, scrutiny, judgments, and authority of fallible academia instead of being regarded as the living, active, breathing holy Word of God by which we, not the Bible, but we bow down to its supreme authority. But there was no such concept of this professionalism inside the head of the apostle Paul. All of what was going on in his head transferred to his heart bringing transformation in himself and in others into Christlikeness.

 How about you? As you journeyed with us through the book of Romans and saw all the magnificent heights and depths of the doctrines of sin, justification, assurance, sanctification, election, reprobation, the church, Israel, the government, etc. did that raise your heart to worship and praise God ever more? Did hearing more in depth about Christ and His atonement make you want to obey Christ even more out of love and gratitude for what He did? Or did all that information and truth only go to your head and not your heart? If you realize that the truths that you heard and agree to are haven’t really affected your affections, then ask yourself why that’s the case. Could it be that your own pride is in the way in that you like to hear more about doctrine not because you want to love God and others more, but because you love knowing more than others and showing to others that you know more correct doctrine than them? Or could it be that the reason why that information in Romans has reached your head and not your heart is because your heart is not right with Him? That there is not even a soft place in your heart for the seed of the gospel to be planted because your heart is a heart of stone and not a heart of flesh? If that’s the case, then you must call on the Lord for a new heart. Ask Him to take away and remove the heart of stone that is in you, that cold, rocky heart that is calcified by sinful pride. Ask Him to remove your heart of sin and for Him to give you a living, beating heart that beats to the glory of God’s grace. And only then, will the Scriptures come alive to you and will you then see the truth of Scripture as a marvelous truth, a saving truth and a glorious truth from the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only then will you have a faith that leads to obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.