

The Church and the Gospel

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Well, if you turn, please, to Romans chapter 16 in your Bibles. Romans chapter 16.

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Romans chapter 16. Romans chapter 16. I know that when I first met Susan's dad, he's called Alan, but his real name's Joseph.

But out on the farm, he's called John. So you can... I was wondering what I was marrying into, but don't ask me to explain it.

[1 : 37] It was just... That was it. So I said, right, can I call you Pete? Because it really doesn't make any difference, you know. Romans 16.

Now hear God's word. I commend to you, our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Caesarea, 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 mine and of myself as well. Of many and of myself as well, sorry.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 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.

Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epinatus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, that they are well known to all the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

[2 : 57] Greet Amplanteus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Eubanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Satycus. Greet Apeleus, who is approved in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsmen, Herodian. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.

Greet those workers in the Lord, Trypenea and Tryposa. Greet the beloved Peris, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord.

Also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Ancinecris, Theligion, Hermes, Patrobus, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.

Greet Phylogius, Julia, Nereus, and his sister Olympas. And all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[4 : 02] All the churches of Christ greet you. I appeal to you, therefore, I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught.

Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. And by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive.

For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you.

So does Lucius and Jason and Sophissar, my kinsmen. I, Tyriotus, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

[5 : 04] Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quatris, greet you.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel, and to the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed, and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations.

According to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, be glory forevermore, through Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. So, last time, we recognized that in coming towards the end of the letter of Romans, that the letter is a missionary letter.

At the beginning, you're convinced into thinking that this letter is presenting the gospel in order to set the doctrine straight in the church at Rome, but by the time you get to chapter 14 and chapter 15 in these latter chapters, you begin to realize that this is a church that's full of goodness, full of knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

[6 : 39] Why would a church like that need to know more? Well, number one is because all churches need reminding of what the core gospel is. But Paul does say, on some points I've had to put my foot down.

On some points I've had to speak to you boldly, as by way of reminder. And there always is that tension, isn't there, where you can become impatient with having to say the same thing over and over and over again.

And Paul doesn't get impatient, or it doesn't appear that he gets impatient, because he understands that gospel repetition is exactly the same as the carpenter sanding the same piece of wood over and over and over again.

Okay, the reason we say the same things to children as they grow up is because we're trying to turn rough pieces of timber into smooth, finished articles. In the same way men and women remind each other in a marriage, or we remind each other in the church, we do it because we're trying to rub off those rough edges so that we can be smooth and finished articles in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we can be presented as blameless before Christ when he comes.

And God uses us for those reasons. He uses us to shape one another through words, through fellowship, through abiding, being able to instruct one another.

[8 : 10] But essentially, as we get to the end, we recognize that the letter of Romans is a missionary letter. Paul is on his way to Spain. He wants to come and see them, but he doesn't want to stop with them.

He wants to go on to Spain because if he comes to Rome, what is he going to do there? There's already a church. There's already believers. They're already able to instruct one another. What is Paul going to do in a place where they're more or less complete, so to speak?

Well, he wants to go there to present to them the gospel that he's then going to take to Spain. In other words, he's coming to Rome to say, this is why you should support me.

I'm going to go off to Spain to present the gospel. This is my gospel. And so he's asking them for the kind of support to be sent.

Now, he doesn't ask for money. It's just guaranteed in a fellowship full of believers that that's what you do. Okay? In a fellowship full of people, you support one another in order to present the gospel in places where it hasn't been presented.

[9 : 20] So this letter, at the end, has a real missionary feel about it. The church is to serve the same purpose. We are here to be involved in the partnership of the gospel so that the gospel can be spread, not amongst ourselves, but outside of the building.

Okay? Every person should hear the gospel. And God wants us to make sure every person gets to hear the gospel.

The other thing you notice here, which is an underlying current to all of the New Testament letters, is the sense of permanency. And the reason I highlight that is because we've just had a members' meeting.

Permanency is crucial. Now, there are some people who think you can't promote permanency, and that's just not the case. Permanency here is seen in the sense that you don't get any impression that the work can't continue once the money's run out.

Well, we haven't got any money, therefore we can't spread the gospel. You don't get that impression in any New Testament church. Money is not a motivating factor for the spread of the gospel.

[10 : 34] Rather, what you do see is that the congregation shares in the same type of work and sacrifice as the missionary. We don't do that. We expect missionaries to live one type of lifestyle, okay, and we expect the church, okay, because we naturally fall into it, to live a different one.

But in Scripture, you don't see that distinction being made at all. The missionary on the field is sacrificing no more than what those in the church are sacrificing.

The missionary on the field is not being involved in any kind of work that those back in the sending church are not involved in. But too often, when we read missionary letters and we look at sending missionaries out and abroad and what, you can clearly see the distinction between hometown comforts and in the country, hard work, missionary work.

And I don't think that's a distinction that should even be there. It is there. It's there because that's just the way things are. But I don't think it should be there. Who then needs to change?

Does the missionary on the field need to have more comfort? Or do the people in the church need to live like missionaries? Okay? Does the missionary need to have a little bit more, you know, a nice big house with a swimming pool at the back and a couple of cars?

[11 : 57] Or does the church need to say, hang on a minute, there's a little bit of luxury here that we can do without? Okay? The attitude here is that nothing should be motivated by financial, but rather sacrifice and common purpose.

Sacrifice and common purpose. The ambition of the church should be the spread of the gospel. The ambition of the missionary should be the spread of the gospel.

Because the gospel is the only thing, as it says here, that brings people to the obedience of faith. How are people going to obey God when they naturally don't want to?

They have to hear the gospel. And how are Christians who are getting into the rut of perhaps not obeying God in all the areas that they should, going to be brought back to the place where they obey God?

Well, Paul writes to Rome the gospel. You need to hear the gospel again. Why? Because in the gospel, it's all about the one who sacrificed, the one who, though he was rich, became poor, that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

[13 : 11] That's the kind of partnership that we share in. We want to talk about sharing a life with Christ. That's the person we follow. I have to deal with my own sin and one of the sins that I have to deal with quite frequently, I don't mind saying this openly, is a sense of entitlement.

I have a real problem with a sense of entitlement. I think, this and that and the other and then I have to remind myself I am saved by a homeless man. Okay?

Here I am with a huge sense of entitlement but I'm saved by a homeless man. And every time I remember that I bring my whole life back in check. Suddenly I feel a whole lot better, worse and better all at the same time.

And this is the underlying depth and attitude and motivation of church and missionary. Paul wants to go to Spain and he wants to go to Spain with the blessing and with the gospel.

So, in short, I want to, if I can, put this into a concrete application. So, bear with me. I'll be frank, I'll be short and I'll be honest.

[14 : 25] But I'll put this into a concrete application. On Wednesday evening, we had our members meeting and of course, during that members meeting, I got sent out of the room.

Now, just in case for you who weren't there, I didn't get sent out of the room because I did anything wrong for once. But I got sent out of the room because the issue of finances was being talked about.

I think that was a pretty sensible idea. But I think I could have added to the conversation and come up with a different result. In fact, I'm pretty sure I would have come up with a different result than you did.

But I recognize that the church's decision and hey-ho, praise God for how he works through the congregation. But I hope you noticed in your discussion that air funding for the missionaries run out before the next members meeting.

And so I hope included in your agreement to keep expenses the same, you also had your eyes wide open and looked far ahead to include them in those future expenses.

[15 : 36] I hope in your discussion they were not excluded. And I hope they weren't excluded because it's a long time before our next members meeting and the money would have run out before we have another members meeting to agree on it.

And you're thinking, hang on a minute, we didn't get to that point. You shouldn't have sent me out the room then. Okay? You should have kept me in. If the church is going to think about these things, then we need to think about these things with a great deal of foresight, with a great deal of

sharing and partnership in what we actually do.

We're a church that has sent people and we have a responsibility to support those that we have sent and that means thinking ahead. So that's the concrete application of Romans 16 here.

So I've got three short headings to help us through this evening. You'll understand that the first part contains loaded names and they're all positive people. In other words, they're all good people.

They're all people who have contributed. So part one, good people. You'll then notice in the final instructions in verse 17 that Paul wants to highlight that even though the church is full of good people, however, there are a few bad people in it.

[16:54] Okay? Good people and problem people. The problem people don't serve the common interest. They do, however, serve themselves. And then finally, the ultimate purpose of the gospel.

Paul finishes his letter in exactly the same way he began it, with the sole reason for the gospel, the reason we proclaim the gospel. So, firstly, the good people.

You'll notice in verse 16, Paul is commending Phoebe. It's a recommendation of praise not only to Phoebe and to Priscilla and Aquila, but to all the other people that are mentioned.

Paul is praising them. Look at how hard they work. Priscilla and Aquila even risked their own lives. They've opened up their homes, other people have.

Some people are working incredibly hard. In fact, all the people are working hard. And when he describes these people, he doesn't just describe them as workers, he describes them as fellow workers.

[17:59] Okay, verse 3, greet Priscilla and Aquila my fellow workers. Not just workers, but fellow workers. In other words, workers in the fellowship. Workers together for the same cause and end.

But then he says, when there is occasion where the gospel is God has put in prison, we're not just prisoners, but we are fellow prisoners. Again, we're sharing the same purpose for being here.

We're fellow workers and fellow prisoners. Verse 5. There's a real sense here that when the gospel comes into a person's life, it changes how they live that life.

I'm not just a worker, but I'm a fellow worker. I'm not just a prisoner, but I'm a fellow prisoner. I don't just work, but I work hard. Okay, I want you to think about that a minute. Christians in the church ought to set an example of hard work.

Okay, it's easy, it's easy to be a lazy minister. It's easy to be lazy in the church. Okay, I often wondered that if I was in the Church of England and given three parishes, the temptation that I'd always say, I was at the other parish this morning.

[19:15] Right? Who would know? Okay? Now, because I'm sinful enough to think like that, that if laziness got hold and the idleness kicked in, then you can understand how easy it is to not work hard.

But Paul is explaining a group of people here in the church who don't just serve the same purpose, but who work hard. They're not just doing it, but there's almost blood, sweat, and tears in the work that they do.

They're tired. No doubt that when they do it, they're tired. No doubt they're fed up. No doubt that when they do it, they have all of these emotions that we might have when we think, it's me again.

I'm on the road to again. When is somebody else going to stand up? I understand that those things are pressures and they mount, but working hard for the Lord is a given.

Working hard for Jesus is something that we ought to do because the gospel brings about the obedience of faith and hard work.

[20:20] Hard work. Now, back in the day, in fact, not even back in the day, if you go back into the sort of brethren churches, and I can even take you to a few now, letters of recommendation were a given.

If you were to go from one assembly to another assembly, before you could take communion, you had to take with you, for instance, a letter of recommendation. And that's a good practice because who do you know is coming up and taking?

Now, I agree with some of it. I don't agree with all of it. But you can understand that even in the secular world, references are to be provided for you to take hold of a job.

And they sometimes have to be professional people. In other words, you know, your favorite brother can't write your reference, or the guy that owes you 500 quid can't write you the reference because, you know, he's got a motive to really write you a good one.

Okay? It has to come from someone of good standing. And so here in the church, Paul is recommending these people. He is commending these people.

[21 : 22] Why? Well, because of the next thing that he's going to say. He needs to know and he wants us to know who we should greet with a holy kiss, verse 17, and who we shouldn't.

Okay? Verse 16 ends with, greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. And then immediately after, he talks about problem people. But watch out for those who cause divisions.

Paul doesn't want us to be silly. He wants us to be awake to the real threat that there is in the church. But the real threat, you'll notice, is not just a people one, it's actually a spiritual one. That the real issue here is Satan. That's why he finishes in verse 20 that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. So, problem people are normally motivated by something other than just being problem people.

God will crush Satan under your feet because you are in Christ and therefore he will crush them, crush Christ completely. Christ will crush Satan completely.

[22 : 36] But the issue here is one of a spiritual nature. Paul says over in Ephesians we don't wrestle against flesh and blood. In other words, it's not people that we have the problems with.

It appears in the form of people. It appears in the form of personality and characters and all the things that go with it. But underlying that is a spiritual issue.

And the issue is we're not wrestling, we're not up against personality. We're up against something of a spiritual evil nature. Satan is at work to cause division and to cause destruction.

The spiritual forces of evil are real. Now, here's a word of caution. An unhealthy attention in this is dangerous.

An unhealthy attention towards the things of evil, the spiritual forces of evil, is not a good thing to be interested in. But to have no interest at all would be equally dangerous for the church.

[23 : 38] Okay? To be over interested would be dangerous because you're thinking that everything falls into, it must be Satan, it must be Satan. As if, I can remember one Scottish minister once saying, I forget his name, it might have even been, no, I can't, I forget his name.

But I can remember him saying, he says, you know, sometimes the human nature can be so evil that you claim it's Satan when really it's nothing more than the person.

Okay? You know, some people are just bad for the sake of being bad. And the Bible warns us against people who have those destructive type of hungers for being bad.

Okay? But nevertheless, there is spiritual forces of evil. So to have an unhealthy attention towards it's not good, but to have no attention at all means you're not going to fight it.

When was the last time you prayed to be protected from the spiritual forces that attack your life, your family's life, and the church? When was the last time you got on your knees before God and asked that the spiritual forces of evil would not damage our fellowship?

[24 : 49] Okay? It's one of those things that because you can't see it, the danger is you don't pray for it. But the reason Paul makes us aware of it, both here in Romans and over in Ephesians, is because it is a real threat where the weapons of our warfare, faith, prayer, and the word of God, is the means of fighting against it.

Okay? Things don't just turn out the way that they do because there it goes. No, Satan destroys things. The spiritual forces of evil wreaks havoc in families, in homes, in the church, in your life personally.

So we need to be aware, but we need to be aware in order to fight them with the weapons that God gives us. Prayer, faith, and the word of God. Now I want you to think about the kind of destruction this causes in this way.

Have you ever noticed how straight roads are normally not a problem, generally speaking? That if you're driving along a straight road, it's generally not too much of a problem if it's a long straight road and it's a wide road.

But I can remember once driving behind a person who a long straight road was a huge problem for. And it was because the person in front of me had a destructive hunger.

[26 : 03] Now Proverbs speaks very, very clearly of children developing destructive hungers and how to avoid them. Okay? And adults who also have destructive hungers and how to avoid it.

And suddenly you begin to realize that to put children on a straight road is not enough. To simply say you go in this direction and it's straight, you begin to realize it's not enough. Because it's what

they fill their life with which becomes the problem.

Let me illustrate. I was driving behind a clearly intoxicated driver. It was a straight road but he must have been drunk completely.

So this straight road which was fairly easy for me to drive along was incredibly difficult for him to drive along. He was all over the place simply because he had an unhealthy appetite for drink. He was drunk to such an extent that not only could he not drive in a straight line but not only was he a danger to himself but he was a danger to everybody else on the road. Telling him to go straight wasn't good enough.

[27 : 09] The problem was his hunger for alcohol. And I knew who the man was funnily enough because I got out, I flashed him down and I got out and he drove off again despite my best efforts to stop him.

And it was lo and behold I got up to the car and thought hey I know who you are. And off he went. And I knew the guy, I knew he had a problem with alcohol. And there it was.

Filling his life with a destructive hunger for the wrong thing and straight roads become a problem. Not just a problem for him but a problem for everybody else on that road.

And so here we are in the church where things more or less are pretty straightforward. But there are some people, Paul says, that have destructive hungers. They simply serve themselves.

And as they serve themselves, as they fill themselves, as they feed their own appetites, they then become a danger to everybody else around them. They're not serving God, he says, they're simply serving themselves.

[28 : 10] And that's the problem. The problem people. Paul then ends with a purpose to why they need to receive the gospel, why we need to hear the gospel continually, and why the gospel must be spread throughout the entire land.

Before he gets to that, he says that you must remember that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Which is a very strange thing to say because the promise of the head of Satan being crushed was always put to Jesus in Genesis 3.15.

And Genesis 3.15, it's the first promise of Jesus Christ that he would crush the head of the serpent. He would bruise his heel, but the head of the serpent would be crushed by the foot of Christ.

And what Paul has here is just deep, good theology. That because you are in Christ, then Satan will be crushed under your foot because you are naturally in Christ and he'll be crushed under Satan's, under Christ's foot.

So by virtue of you being in Christ, okay, you share in Christ's victory over evil. Okay? I want you to think about that. The only reason we can triumph over evil, the only reason why the spiritual forces of evil cannot take hold of our life to the ultimate destruction is because we are in Christ.

[29 : 41] And because Christ will crush Satan, we will crush Satan by virtue of being in and belonging to Jesus Christ. Hence why Paul can say here that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

It's under your feet because you're in Christ and it's under his feet. We get to share in the victory. And the victory is part and parcel with being obedient or being made obedient through the gospel. Verse 25. Here's the purpose of the gospel. It is to bring about, excuse me, verse 26.

But has now been disclosed through the prophetic writings, has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith.

Paul finishes his missionary letter in the same way he began it in chapter 1 verse 5 by saying that the gospel is to bring about faith. Why do we tell disobedient people the gospel?

[30 : 50] Well, because God wants them to be obedient. Now, they're not disobedient in sort of perhaps moral terms in sort of the world standards. But in God's eyes, if they're not obeying his word, then they're disobedient.

And the gospel is the only thing that can change that. The gospel is the only thing that can take a person who doesn't believe in Christ to believing in Christ. Who doesn't obey God to actually obeying God.

And Paul says back in the beginning, this is why I'm not ashamed. I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the very power of God to make a disobedient person obedient. It is the very power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

And I'm not ashamed of that. I'm not ashamed of that in any way whatsoever. I'm not ashamed that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is the means by which God makes people obedient to him.

Is the means by which God saves men and women, boys and girls. I'm not ashamed of that. Now you can understand why people would be ashamed of that in Paul's day. Because cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

[31 : 56] That's not a good message. Paul said, no, I'm not ashamed. Because this is the very vehicle by which disobedient people are made obedient to God.

The God who governs the world is the God who saves. The God who put Christ to the cross is the God who saves. And the reason why Paul says all of this is verse 25.

He is trying to convince us. He is trying to fix our mind on how we are to be strengthened. We hear the gospel in order to be strengthened. We hear the gospel because in the gospel we learn that God is able.

We're not able. You're not able. but God is. He is able. I want you to think about that. The next time you speak about your friend who doesn't want to hear anything, you're thinking I'm not getting through.

You don't have to get through. Because you're not able but he is able. You think of the person in your family you just can't get through to about the truth of Christ. You don't have to.

[33 : 01] God is able. So when you're at your wit's end thinking when is this going to change? It's not your ability that will ever change it. It's God's ability and he will.

Okay. When God sows gospel seed, okay, it is an imperishable seed. I want you to remember that. Gospel seed is an imperishable seed. In other words, it never goes away.

It never goes away. It's imperishable. It cannot disappear. So the reason we scatter seed everywhere into people's lives is because once it's there, it's there forever.

It will be a constant pebble in some people's shoes whether they want to admit it or not. That's why we are interested in the spread of the gospel.

The reason we need to hear it, Paul says, is to strengthen us. To strengthen us. And so here's the exhortation. As we finish, let's remember that this is a missionary letter.

[34 : 05] Let's remember that Paul is on his way to Spain via Rome, via Jerusalem, via Rome, via Spain. And let's remember the theme of salvation.

That God takes false worshippers to become true worshippers. Okay. Romans 1 is about how the world is full of false worshippers. Romans 12 is about how God transforms a false worshipper, Romans 1, into a true worshipper, Romans 12, through the central act of Christ, Romans 5.

That's the grand theme of Romans. It is the transformation of a false worshipper into a true worshipper through the act of Christ on the cross and resurrection.

The reason we tell the gospel, the reason we tell the gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith. Seek great things for thyself, the Bible says, don't bother.

It doesn't quite say that. It says, seek great things for thyself, seek them not. Be ambitious. But be ambitious about the things of God. Be ambitious about gospel partnership.

[35 : 20] Be ambitious about the spread of the gospel. Be ambitious, not for yourself, but be ambitious for God in gospel work and work hard.

So here's the final thought. That the God of all history is the God of salvation. Think about that.

The God of all history is the God of salvation. salvation. The God who governs the whole world is the God who saves. The God who knows the beginning from the end is the God who accomplishes salvation.

The God who knows every hair on your head and every day that you have to live is the God who saves. What does that mean? It means this.

That the gospel was always the central idea of God. The gospel was always the grand purpose of God. That whatever else we see in salvation history and history and all God's governance and all God's ordinances throughout the world, the central theme that runs through all of them is the gospel.

[36 : 34] That God wants the world to hear the gospel. So when you're sat at home this next year coming up to Christmas, think about that.

As you write your diary for the following year, I want you to have that on your mind. As you plan your future, I want you to think about the future that God has planned for you. Hence why Paul says, I'm off to Spain.

Why is he off to Spain? He's off to Spain because the gospel needs to spread. The gospel needs to be heard, not by those in Rome, though it does, but by those who have never heard it.

The reason we preach the gospel is because even our next door neighbor hasn't heard it yet.
Amen. Amen.