

<b>Series:</b> Romans	<b>Reference:</b> Romans 16:3-5	<b>Title:</b> Church at Its Best!	<b>Date:</b> 3.12.17
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
Today we look at a few supportive people enabling Paul & others to fulfill the calling of the local church to 'reach the nations'. One of those being Priscilla, and in light of International Women's Day, we remember some of the women of faith like her who've done great things for the kingdom of God!			

## Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

Romans 16 is a great chapter; in it Paul greets twenty-seven people by name, as well as two unnamed persons, as well as a number of whole households, and several churches which were meeting in homes. If we could count all those people up, this may be a personal greeting anywhere from 75 to a few hundred people. But we can only guess at that number. But we do know it is well over 30. He closed with greetings from eight believers who were with him in Corinth when he wrote the letter.

Paul was a friend-maker as well as an evangelist. He didn't isolate himself; he had friends who were a help to him personally & in ministry. He appreciated, honored & relied upon them.<sup>1</sup> I specifically thought about some of you in this room when I considered this. People who make friends easily. Friend-makers. People like Rob Schaeffer. who seems particularly gifted in making connections with people. And I could go on and on, you guys are warm friendly people - don't be slighted if I didn't mention your name since I could literally read off the whole list of people in this church! You make friends easily, and you keep friends well. One of the greatest assets of our church is our welcoming spirit & warmth towards newcomers or people in this outside community.

A new couple said to me last week that on their first Sunday here they were swarmed in a good way with people welcoming them. That they visited many churches and this was the only one with which they had that experience. As a matter of fact, I think many of you struggle that you have too many relationships to keep up with because of all the friends you have. I constantly hear of the ongoing connection we have with people who've moved away even years ago. That's a blessing. And that is a great part of ministry that you guys do well.

Romas 16 is a sweet intimate picture of the local church. Believers working well together. A very personal glimpse into the life of this group of Christians at that time in the history of the Church. It records names of people who lived, walked with Jesus, did ministry together, loved each other, worked alongside Paul & each other, and then died. They left a legacy. It makes me think, how many churches & Christians have come & gone over history all building the foundation & walls of the kingdom of God. A house made of people & filled with the Spirit of God. Faithful people who've walked with the Lord & each other strongly bringing encouragement to the world, and each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 565.

Today we simply meet a few of those people in vv3-5 as Paul writes... *<sup>3</sup>Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup>They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. <sup>5</sup>Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.*

I want to focus mostly today on this couple - Priscilla & Aquila. We seem to know most about these two. Acts 18 gives us some background on this relationship they had with Paul. He'd just come from Athens where he had witnessed to a group of Athenian philosophers using their own cultural cues to enter the conversation...in other words Paul has been out reaching the unreached nations/people groups as he's urged the church to do throughout Romans. And these people helped him to do that...

*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. <sup>4</sup> Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*

Notice that in v2 Luke places Aquila's first in Acts 18. That is important when we get back to Romans 16...but for now let's just notice that he met these people. They had been driven out of Italy due to a governmental order, and they shared his trade of tent making with him. So they lived and worked together. And it seems that they may've taken some of the weight of that work so that Paul could have free time to persuade Jews & Greeks in the Synagogue as to the good news of Christ. I just think it's important to note that we can't do ministry without the support of others.

I think of Lindley when she first came on staff. I always remember what she said, "I want to take some of the weight off of you on Sunday morning so that you can be free to speak with people and not worry about the logistics of the morning." Before she did that, I was very stressed out doing quite a bit on Sunday mornings in set up/breakdown, getting all the logistical details set, and so on. Jordan has continued that ministry well. As did Abby in the interim time between them. Ministry is not a one person job, it takes a community. When someone watches the kids so others can go to Community Group, or do prayer ministry over a person, or go to a community event, these things are equally as important as to the ministry going on at those events. It continues...

*<sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.*

Again, we see that Paul had others come & take more weight, he was even more freed to do the ministry he was called to do. Numbers are important. A growing church where, like Jesus, all people come to serve, and not be served, is a blessing to each other and outside the community it serves.

*<sup>7</sup>Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. <sup>8</sup>Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup>One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. <sup>10</sup>For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." <sup>11</sup>So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*

So we see here the end result of the concerted effort of people like Aquila, Priscilla, Silas & Timothy, that people came to faith - and it's becoming a diverse crowd of Jews, as well as other people groups! They're fulfilling the call of Christ on the local church!

The local church working in unity, and seeing results. And we find out in following verses that this stirred up trouble for Paul in Corinth, and people tried to harm him or bring charges against him. And God promised to protect him - which he did. Now, we don't know how Priscilla & Aquila put their necks on the chopping block (which is actually how it translates in Romans 16), but maybe it was situations like this in which they stepped in? Maybe they stood up for Paul & shielded him, arguing on his behalf?

*Then it continues...<sup>18</sup> Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.... <sup>19</sup> They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila.*

*In Acts 19 it says of their time in Ephesus, <sup>28</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. <sup>30</sup> Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.*

Was it Priscilla & Aquila on the front lines in that situation calming people in the middle of the crowd, arguing on Paul's behalf along with others, sending word back to him not to come? Maybe....

Acts 18 goes on to tell us that Paul spent time ministering in Ephesus, but then took off again to Caesarea, then onto Jerusalem then down to Antioch, then onto Galatia & Phrygia continually doing ministry. Then we find this guy Apollos who runs into our friendly couple Priscilla & Aquila. He proved to be a great minister of the Gospel there in Ephesus, although at that point he did not know the whole story of Christ, and...

*When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*

So, rather than seeing this guy as a threat, they welcomed him in & taught him more - so we see that Priscilla & Aquila were helpful ministers of the Gospel as well. They

recognized leadership, and led up! These people we could also call deacons, servants of servants! Teachers of teachers. And the end result of that relationship is that Apollos is sent out advancing the Gospel...

*<sup>27</sup> When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. <sup>28</sup> For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.*

This is the church working well & in unity.... but going back to Romans 16 we see this guy Epenetus, who has the distinction of being named the first convert in the province of Asia. We know he was a convert from Ephesus, but not much else. It could be that he was a product of the ministry of Paul directly, or of Priscilla & Aquila, or of Apollos - we don't really know. But it would seem likely.

Again, this is an image of people, the local church, loving people, enabling ministry, and the results of it are that people come to faith - these unreached people groups, and even some Jews. This guy was the first in a region. Think about all that Paul has said of our call to reach the unreached. Think about the Uzbek, who have 0.01% Christians among them - that 0.01% are the first to believe among an almost exclusively Muslim people group! Imagine what that's like for them, and what it must've been like for Epenetus.

I love Muslims. I devoted 9 years of my life to minister directly to them in a foreign country. And the majority are great fun loving people - I was even adopted as the son of a Muslim Sultan, that's how familiar & close I became. But I do also know that when a person converts to Christianity among Muslims, that it's not a welcomed thing - they at best are shunned, lose jobs & relationships, and at worst lose their lives. They're threatened, tormented & persecuted in that context. I imagine Epenetus may've endured some of the same. These one-liners in Scripture need to be understood in their context - and therefore, we need to appreciate the suffering of brothers & sisters in Christ who went before us for the sake of the Gospel.

People like those two women I mentioned last week who went to their death as Pliny the Governor of Bythia recalled. There's an old story of two Christian women fed to the lions in the Colosseum which may be the women of which Pliny spoke. But the cool thing about it is they didn't complain, they stood & tied their hair back in quiet protest before going to death. In light of *International Women's Day* this past week, we remember these strong women like Phoebe, Priscilla, the two martyrs whom Pliny recalled.

Or, Saint Antonia of Nicaea who in A.D. 306 was charged with insulting the pagan gods. Upon her refusal to offer incense to the Roman deities, she was stripped & hanged by her arms. Then her tormentors tore her sides with rakes. Remaining steadfast in faith, Antonia was finally placed into a sack & drowned in a nearby lake.

Or Agnes who was barely 13 & died by the sword. Ambrose honored her by saying, “There was not even room in her little body for a wound. Though she could barely receive the sword's point, she could overcome it. Girls of her age tend to wilt under the slightest frown from a parent. Pricked by a needle, they cry as if given a mortal wound. But Agnes showed no fear of the blood-stained hands of her executioners. She was undaunted by the weight of clanging chains. She offered her whole body to the sword of the raging soldiers. Too young to have any acquaintanceship with death, she nevertheless stood ready before it. Dragged against her will to the altar of sacrifice, she was ready to stretch out her hands to Christ in the midst of the flames, making the triumphant sign of Christ the victor on the altars of sacrilege. She was even prepared to put her neck & hands into iron bands - though none of them was small enough to enclose her tiny limbs. She stood still, praying, and offered her neck. You could see the executioner trembling as though he were himself condemned. His right hand began to shake, and his face drained of color aware of her danger, though the child herself showed no fear.”

Her crime? She refused an arranged marriage since she wanted to be free to serve Jesus with her whole life.... Of course there were many other female martyrs during the periodic persecutions until A.D.313. I could go on & on with their names & stories; Blandina, Lucy, Potamiaena, Perpetua, Felicity & many others. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church, and we can't underestimate the female contribution to this. Paul lifts these women up, honoring them in his letter.

One thing you would not have noticed in Romans 16 is that in putting Priscilla's name first before her husbands, Paul was elevating her status. **One commentary states, “The frequent sneers at Paul about his views respecting the female sex & their prerogatives might be spared us, were this chapter carefully read. The order here is a sufficient answer: the wife's name first, because she was foremost, no doubt. The standard is, after all, capacity, not sex. Both are called “my helpers,” and it would seem that, as such, they were both engaged in spiritual labors, which term includes vastly more than public preaching.”<sup>2</sup>** Priscilla must have been a hardworking devoted follower of Christ. One who was brave in the face of death, and one who protected Paul & did a great deal in the development of the church & the furtherance of God's kingdom! Amen!

**As a couple they seemed to plant a house church wherever they went; Corinth, Ephesus, Italy. They were ministers of the Gospel!** In 1 Co 16:19 it says, <sup>19</sup> *The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla <sup>y</sup> greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.*

Hospitable friend-makers who opened their home to others to see that the Gospel went forward. It's good to remember them, and to get this intimate picture of the early church fulfilling it's call to reach the nations. Supporting & working alongside the Apostle Paul in ministry.

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<sup>2</sup> John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 447.

We have two such people here today, Rob & Maria Granholm. If we were writing an account like Acts 18, or Romans 16 we might mention them. Rob & Maria have a growing family, they just added little Evaline to their litter who is growing up in this ongoing Christian tradition & under the parenthood of two people who do much for this church & therefore the Gospel of Christ. Our hope is that she will carry the torch of Christ into adulthood under the guidance of her parents & this church.

In thinking about Priscilla & Aquila, and the affect they had on others for Christ, I am reminded of all the Granholm's have done for us in this church. They've held parties where they bring together Christians & non-Christians. They've opened their homes for Community Groups in order for people to study the Word together. They've led those studies. They've housed people when there was need. They opened their home to Sammy Zondervan as she was preparing to go to the mission field. As well as 4 Indonesian missionaries who could barely speak English for a week while they were in town. They've had another woman stay with them when she was going through a difficult time. Maria helped to get our tax exempt & 501c3 status up using her skills as a lawyer - and for free! They've served in our community partnerships furthering the witness of Christ among our neighbors. They've encouraged me & ministered alongside me. They've enabled many of us to do ministry. These are people of the church who give of their resources & time to see the Gospel go forward. They're not here to be served, they're here to serve. So we want to extend the blessing of dedication to their daughter today as we remember all that. Why don't you guys come on up...

**PRESENTATION:**

It is an honor & privilege to encourage & assist parents in the training & development of their children as members of our church. We share in the responsibility of raising & guiding children to maturity in Christ.

The act of dedication is in keeping with the Scriptures, Jesus himself was dedicated by his parents. Dedication doesn't bring about justification, that's reserved for God himself. We believe, however, our relationship to Jesus brings a unique favor for our children in the eyes of God.

God rejoices over these little guys, and we share in that. We want to give thanks for her today. We want to make a promise, relying on the grace of God, to provide guidance, instruction, discipline, and most importantly to lead them, as best we are able, to know Jesus. We remember how Jesus blessed the children he came in contact with, and today we want to pray for blessings on this girl in the same way. To entrust our children to the care of a loving & gracious God is to put them in the best of hands.

We acknowledge Mr. & Mrs. Rob & Maria Granholm who present their daughter, Evaline Rae Granholm, before God & this body of believers today. Rob/Maria will now read a passage of Scripture which they have chosen for this occasion, and say a few words. (Reading for Evaline.)

**THE COMMITMENT:** Rob & Maria, in presenting your child to the Lord, do you promise in dependence upon God's grace, and in reliance on your community of faith, to teach her the truths of the Christian faith, to set an example before her, to bring her up in the instruction & discipline of the Lord, and to encourage her to accept Jesus as her savior under the leadership & guidance of the Holy Spirit?

**Parents:** We do.

To those who consider themselves members of Christ's family, do you promise to join these parents in the teaching & training of this child that they may be led in due time to trust Jesus as savior, and to confess him in baptism & church membership? If you accept this responsibility, will you indicate that by saying, "We do"?

**Congregation:** We do.

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** Please stand with me as I pray.

Father, we come before you today, in the name of Jesus, under the umbrella of your grace, and the leading of your Spirit, to celebrate & welcome Evaline into your care & our church.

You're the giver of life. You knew her long before we did. She's your treasure & joy. You're Lord over her life. We entrust her to the guidance of your Spirit, placing her in your care. There's no better place for her to be.

We realize this does not absolve us of any responsibility. We understand you've called us to love, care for, protect & lead her, as we're led by your Word & Spirit. Your will's expressed through your Word & Spirit, and flows out of the loving actions, words & thoughts of your people. We endeavor today to promise to raise her well, becoming a buffer, pointing her to You. We ask for blessing on her life & future. We ask you'd empower us for this ministry entrusted to us. That you'd quicken our thoughts for words of encouragement. That your Spirit would speak clearly to us concerning her life. That you'd convict us where we're not being a strong witness for her. That you'd keep us from exasperating her, but instead we'd be a grace, and encouragement; always placing her small hand in yours. Helping her to walk physically, then spiritually, until she can stand on her own reaching for You on her own.

We ask for special blessing on the parents. That all negative patterns would be broken. Newness would flow. That they'll have learned the mistakes of life & the wisdom not to mete those onto Evaline. Steel their resolve to follow you. Prepare them for all stages of life they'll experience with her. Let them have the resolve of the heavenly Father, never giving up, always running to & embracing her even if she turns away. Let them be parents of grace, fortitude & love. Parents of credibility & integrity, shining examples so Evaline can always look back pointing to them as a model of Your character & grace. Let these things be in their lives starting today...and all the people said, AMEN!

## **Community Group Leaders**

Open by rereading Romans 16:3-5 again & reminding everyone of what the sermon addressed.

Then read Acts 18 together slowly having everyone highlight words, phrases or thoughts which stick out to them as you do. Take a few minutes (lectio divina style) to meditate silently on this passage together. Read it twice if you feel it's appropriate or needed.

1. Ask what things stuck out to people and why?
2. How do you see the local church working together well in this passage?
3. How do you see the calling of Christ to 'reach the nations' being lived out here?
4. What does it mean to work well together as the church? And, how do you see that happening at Six:Eight?
5. What does it mean to be responsible for each other, and our children?
6. How does a church raise a child together? Some practical things?
7. Do you feel that the details, no matter how small (babysitting, bringing a meal, doing hospitality, having a party, calling someone to encourage them, etc.), are important in church life? How do they all together enable the church to fulfill its mission? How do you see these things happening at Six:Eight?