

Sermon Growth Guide

Author: Suzanne Gradin

OF WOMEN AND MEN | Romans 16:1-7

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Key Verse: Romans 16:7 - "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was."

Big Idea: Women and Men had leadership in the early Church.

Foundations

This week we start a new theme, "In the Company of Friends."

This passage comes at the end of the book of Romans, right after Paul has wrapped up his upcoming plans. He has just finished talking about his hope and prayer of being refreshed together with his friends. As he thinks of his Roman friends, he sends greetings and also sends his commendation of Phoebe. Paul is both making and strengthening connections among the believers.

These friendships were not just helpful and encouraging. They also brought a witness to unbelievers as to how the body of Christ operated. The Church was a living example of what it meant to live out the beauty of Galatians 3:28, which says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Friendship is important. Ministering together is important. As Pastor Tim reminds us, preaching the resurrection, each of us telling others of Jesus, is crucial. Paul does not shy away from his greetings, from our singular purpose, or from giving honor where it is due.

Today's sermon pointed out that the early church had many women in influential positions. What a legacy, to know that these women followed God's call on their lives. Paul was in community with women and men who were passionate and committed to making sure that the world knew of Jesus Christ.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read Romans 16:1-7.

Paul has a list of people he's grateful for, people who have supported him, encouraged him, and even risked their lives for him. Paul is very aware of the team that surrounds him. Is there anything or anyone that surprised you in this list?

Applying God's Word

We live in a fairly independent culture. But in this passage, Paul acknowledges and encourages those who influenced him, even those he's indebted to. He recognizes his friends. Who has been on your "team"?

Paul specifically calls out the women that he is grateful for. Are there women that you can acknowledge?

Witnessing God's Word

Both the Apostle Paul and Jesus actively encouraged women. We live in a culture where, unfortunately, the worldwide Christian Church is sometimes thought of as being "against" women. What can you do to change that trajectory?

Pastor Tim reminds us that the Bible tells us to honor women. What does this look like for you?

We Romans ends with the longest list of friends in the Bible. C. S. Lewis said, "Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not need to create). It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." Since the 1960's we have elevated sexual love as the highest form of human relationship. For most of history, friendship was the highest virtue; even intimate, physical love within marriage was encouraged to take on the forms of friendship. The greatest marriages are great friendships. Singles, widows, those who are not given to marriage between a man and a woman can take heart that life is not empty without sex. Paul never married. Jesus never married. But they had full lives full with friendship. It is a gift of God that we do not pass through this world alone. In the church we find that we are In the Company of Friends.

That's the big theme to close out our journey through Romans, friendship. But first, this passage is one of the key passages for understanding the roles of women and men in the early church. Of Women and Men. In When Harry Met Sally, Harry said women and men can never be friends, the sexual tension will always ruin it. In some odd ways the church seems to agree; we seem to go with Harry. Jesus gathered women among his followers. The early church was full of women in influential positions. In Paul's list of friends, out of twenty-nine, ten are women: a Deacon (Phoebe), a church planter (Priscilla), an apostle named Junia, and many coworkers and friends. Harry was wrong; women and men can be friends in Christ.

Why would a church like First Pres, a biblical-ly-conservative, evangelical, Presbyterian and Reformed church, why would we have women ordained as Elders? Do we just pick and choose what we want out of the Bible? Do we not take the Word of God seriously enough to bend our practices to its counter-cultural positions? We ordain and honor women and men in every office of the church because the Bible tells us so. Not everyone will agree, and that's okay. This is not a salvation issue, but I want us to look at Romans 16 and share why First Pres ordains women along with men, and I pray there is some healing in it.

It starts with Phoebe. "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me." (Romans 16:1-2) "I commend to you" means she is carrying the letter. Phoebe is the courier Paul gave this letter to take to Rome. She was a Deacon. This was a recognized office in the church. John Calvin studied all the titles of church roles, how they get equated and confused, and came out with the conclusion that there are two titular roles in the church: Deacon, devoted to service, and Elder, devoted to leadership. Phoebe was a Deacon. What else can we say? Paul trusted her. She was a benefactor, she supported ministry with her money, which was apparently a lot. She was traveling from Corinth to Rome on her own agenda. The language about helping her is kind of legal, business-y language. Phoebe was headed to Rome on a business matter and able to carry the letter as a sister in Christ.

Then Paul lists all the friends he wants to greet in that church in Rome. How does he know so many? He's never been there. Well, the church in Rome, particularly the Jewish background believers, got kicked out of Rome by Emperor Claudius in 49 AD and scattered to Corinth and Ephesus and all around. Paul met them out in exile. First on the list are Priscilla and Aquila. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house." (Romans 16:3-5) Acts 18-19 tell how they were exiled from Rome, met up with Paul in Corinth where they got tight, went with Paul to Ephesus to plant the church, stayed in Ephesus and led in the church until they got to go home to Rome after Claudius died in 54 AD. They helped Paul survive the riots. Priscilla is listed first. That's unusual. Paul honors her place. She's the first name on the whole list. They had a church in their house in Rome that they led together just like they had in Ephesus.

Epenetus, the first convert in Asia! We will get to the guys next week, I want to show you the women. "Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you." (Romans 16:6) Mary is a Jewish name. Miriam. Most of the names sound Roman. If you got Roman citizenship, even if you had a Jewish name, you would also take a Roman name. Probably most people on the list are Jewish background believers, but not all. "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was." (Romans 16:7) Andronicus is a man, Junia a woman. They are counted among the apostles—small "a" apostles. Big "A" Apostles are the twelve disciples and Paul. Still, a woman and a man listed as apostles, missionaries, sent Christian workers, recognized by the church, who sat in prison with Paul. And on it goes past our reading for today.

What do you see among the company of friends? It's like those who accompanied Jesus. There are men and there are women. The women are contributing, leading, serving, holding named positions in the church, as much as the men. Isn't this Paul? Isn't this the famous misogynist who forced all women to sit down and be quiet? I wish we could go through all the passages that come across that way, but let's at least look at one. Look at 1 Timothy. Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy on how to run a church well and keep the church focused on the mission to reach its city with the gospel. One part reads, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." (1 Timothy 2:11-12) Paul is encouraging Timothy to pastor his people away from behaviors that would make them lose their platform of witness in Ephesus. He has given Timothy all kinds of tips on keeping worship faithful while not losing the relevance, the evangelistic opportunity the church has won in that city. Pray for the city leaders, "for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:2-4) The church is there to reach the lost, to execute on the Great Commission, to seek and to save.

Do you ever get confused that the same person who writes, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), also defines all these differences? How can Paul, who so clearly articulates the eternal value of every human being in Christ also encourage slaves to remain in slavery, women to restrain their voice, idol-meat eaters to keep eating idol meat, and the rest? Paul—and the same thing happens in Peter's letters—is concerned that the church, all of us, should be willing to make sacrifices, to prioritize reaching the lost for salvation in Christ over our temporary worldly positions. The grammar does make a difference. The tenses of the verbs are important. "A woman should learn" is a verb tense indicating this is a general truth for all times. "I don't permit" is Paul indicating his current, contextual practice. In first century Ephesus, the gospel will be better heard if the church is careful about how women use their Christ-ordained freedoms. How about Colorado Springs today? Same? It might be the opposite. Dismissal of women hurts the gospel proclamation.

Let's pull up. Bigger picture. Did Jesus include women? Did Jesus talk to women? Even when people said not to? They were not named among the twelve, though, were they? No. But Jesus seemed to be changing things. As Jesus sowed the seeds of the Kingdom of God, his promise in what he said and what he did was that his work, the Kingdom of God, was beginning to reverse the curse of the fall. Sin caused the world to fall into a twisted, broken form. A man is born blind; Jesus gives him sight. A man is born lame; Jesus gives him legs. His first sermon was that passage from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free." (Luke 4:18) The curse is on the reverse. Part of the curse is broken, domineering relations between men and women—a domination competition and all the pain and confusion that has caused. A sign of the reverse is that women receive gifts from the Spirit to be activated as well as men. Peter quoted Joel, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I

will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18) Women and men are different, but the domination competition is not part of the Kingdom.

There is a whole lot more, but this list of leaders teaches us about the Company of Friends. Maybe we have allowed some Roman ideas, some medieval ideas, some Victorian or Early American ideas, to hinder our full understanding of the truth of the Scriptures. I think so. Women and men are different. I am not saying it's the same to be a husband as it is to be a wife; to be a father as to be a mother. Men and women are different by God's design. If you are a man, you have a job to do to be a man of God. If you are a woman, you have a job to do to be a woman of God. These are different things. What I am saying is we don't ordain women because we don't care what the Bible says; we recognize women and men in all offices of the church because Jesus is the Head of the Church and his Word calls us all into service.

We have a principle, "Scripture interprets Scripture." That means we don't cart in ideas from society or the academy or philosophy or experience as though those things have authority to correct the Word of God. Only the Word of God has the authority to shed light on the Word of God. So, when one part is foggy, look to a part that's clear. If the reading is clear, no contradictions, you are done. Don't try to wiggle out of God's clear teaching in his Word. But when the Bible says two different things I can't quite match up, then I look to a clearer part to help me with the foggier part. Women shouldn't teach; Phoebe is the Deacon I trust. Women shouldn't lead; Priscilla leads her church with her husband. Women should be quiet; the Holy Spirit is poured out on women to prophesy. I need a tiebreaker.

For me, the tiebreaker is the resurrection. Amazingly, this was the very scene Abigail and I got to see filmed when we visited the set of The Chosen. The resurrection. Who's there? Mary Magdalene. What did Jesus tell her to do? "Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' ' Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her." (John 20:17-18) Folks, that's all this is. Preaching. That's it. Go and tell. Jesus sent me to preach the good news of the gospel. I'm not a vicarious presence of the male incarnation of Christ. I'm not a baptized analogue of a Roman official. I'm not a military officer in Christian garb or a King, or a Papa/Pope, or a Vicar, or a Father—I'm a gospel preacher. Christ is alive. The tomb is empty. That changes everything. We might be wrong. I'm not mad at you if you disagree, but that is a little taster, a scratch of the surface of what we believe and practice about women and men in the company of friends of Jesus.