

Righteousness Practiced in Triumph

We started a journey as a congregation through the Book of Romans back in April and today we *wrap it up*.

This has been a good series for us. I know that many have heard every message, either here in-person or online. But if you're a first-time guest today, or have only caught a few from the series, I'm confident that you'll get something good from this; each of these messages *stand alone*, having something important for us from God's Word.

We'll start where we *left off* last week in chapter 15 and go through to the end of Romans. I'm going to touch on what I believe are the especially important points, and then settle on a *big idea* that is found at end.

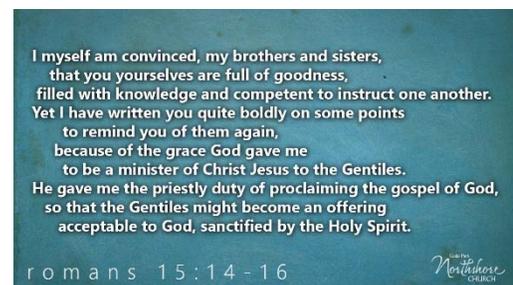
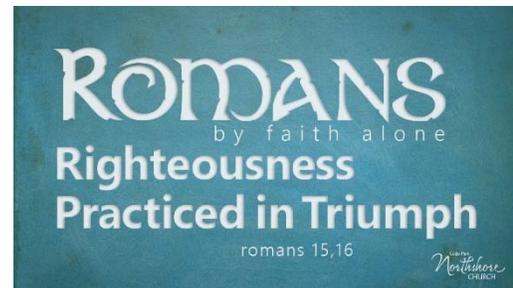
Starting with Romans 15:14, Pastor Paul begins to conclude this important theological text with personal words to the Christians in Rome.

¹⁴ I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

¹⁵ Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹

In Romans we find deep theology as well as instruction... instruction that Paul describes as **quite bold**, even critical. But he ends with **encouragement**. The Gospel does **correct** and **instruct** and calls us to **repentance**... but over it all the Gospel is **The Good News**, and we should expect the Good News to be good and encouraging.

Paul describes the Christians in Rome as good and capable. Of course we know that the Church is not merely a collection of good people, capable of behaving appropriately... but more miraculously and profoundly, the Church is where people changed by the Gospel pursue goodness.



¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 15:14–16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known²

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where Christ was not known
romans 15:17-20

Northshore
CHURCH

What Paul describes here is not merely **his** work and calling... but the work and calling of the Church.

The Gentiles were not merely one isolated people group. In the Jewish mind (like Paul's Jewish mind) there were two categories: the Jews, and everyone else (the Gentiles). So Paul is talking about preaching the Gospel to all people, just as we are all called to be part of this work of spreading the Gospel to everyone in our time.

More than a mere matter of words and travel, the Gospel is accompanied by the **power of signs and wonders...** demonstrating that God cares and is active in our lives. This is the Gospel we believe and experience.

²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. ³

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I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.
romans 15:25-29

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CHURCH

This passage reminds me that ministry always includes fundraising; it is certainly not the **main** thing, but it is *part of the mix*. Anyone involved in the work of the Church, especially anyone in leadership, is always going to have some responsibility to fund the work. We urge people to tithe to their local church, reserving a portion of their income to support the work of the congregation of which they are part. And we raise funds for special work

² The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 15:17–20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 15:23–29). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

together. This is the sort of thing Paul was doing, raising funds from the newer churches in modern-day Turkey to help the struggling churches in Jerusalem.

³⁰ I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.⁴

Ministry always includes prayer. These are common ways for us to be in support of the work of the Church: we give, and we pray.

We pray in solidarity with our friends, family, and colleagues. We pray because prayer changes things. And we especially pray because prayer changes us. We pray on our own. We pray on special occasions. And we pray together. In addition to praying together in services like this, we have several opportunities throughout the week to pray together.



- Tuesday Mornings at 9:00 – People gather for an unstructured hour of prayer. This is a time when we emphasize praying for requests that have come in, as well as Northshore’s ministry in our community and around the world.
- Thursday Mornings at 6:30 – We pray and then often break at 7:00 for a run to the local Starbucks.
- Friday Evenings at 7:00 – Chris Riser hosts two hours of prayer on Friday evenings. Folk gather to worship and pray, both in personal devotion and in intercession for our church and our world.
- Sundays at 9:30 – Those serving on Sunday mornings gather for pre-service prayer; all are invited.

If you are not praying with us and you can make it out at one of these times, you are more than welcomed. Prayer matters.

Chapter 16 begins a long list of personal greetings and commendations. Ministry is a **people business**. Not just great ideas or theology. Not just a product that is marketed to the faceless masses. The Gospel is preached and experienced person to person.

Paul starts the list with Phoebe.

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 15:30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ² 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. ⁵

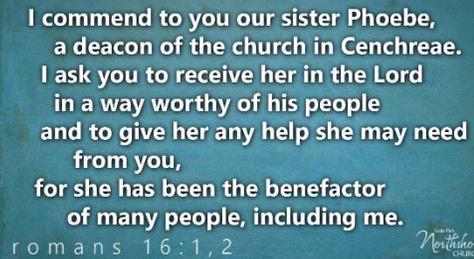
This introduces us to a *disputable matter*:

women in ministry leadership. It is not addressed by the Apostle directly, but it is certainly demonstrated here in Romans 16 as there are several women among those commended, especially the first two in the list: Phoebe and Priscilla.

Last week we talked about how there are disputable matters. The text included matters like eating and drinking, and religious days. But we talked about others like alcohol and politics. When it came to the Q&A we had at the end of last week's talk, I thought someone might ask a

particularly tough question: how do we decide which matters are disputable and which are indisputable? I suspect that there were those that thought of the question, but were just trying to be easy on me (which is appreciated I suppose). I alluded to the answer in saying that the Bible is our best source of determining *which is which*. But often times we need to use our judgement, whether that is interpreting precisely what the Bible means on a particular matter, or in cases when the Bible doesn't deal with some specific matter.

So when it comes to determining which matters are indisputable, we start with the Bible. And then we turn to the Church in community. This is how the Church's historic creeds were hammered out centuries ago. These days we also consider the Churches and leadership with whom we are closely aligned, like the Assemblies of God, the Northwest Ministry Network, and Cedar Park. And when it comes to matters within our congregation, we work with our leadership... both our pastoral leadership and the leaders elected by the congregation on our Leadership Council (it turns out that we have such a matter on our agenda even now that we are working on together).



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



disputable matters

⁵ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 16:1-2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

So, reflecting on the text before us... there is this matter of women in ministry leadership. If you haven't noticed, we have settled this matter among us here at Northshore; we are glad to have women in ministry leadership, whether they are credentialed pastors like Laurie and Allison, or leading on our staff like Jenni and Lynne, or serving as deacons like Melissa Dillon, Jody Brengan, or Liz Ugorcak.

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romans 16:1,2



While this is a settled matter for us (nearly an indisputable matter), we acknowledge that different churches and church traditions hold a different view. It is okay that they are wrong; they can still be Christians.

There are passages in the New Testament that can easily be interpreted to limit the leadership roles available to women. In our view, these passages need to be carefully interpreted within their cultural context. So in cases where the New Testament appears to limit leadership roles for women, it seems to me that these were tied to the specific context. The same rules for disputable matters that we discussed last week apply and it could be argued that exercising liberty to have women in leadership in those specific contexts would have been a stumbling block to those weak in faith.

In this case in Rome, the barrier does not appear to exist. Among the cosmopolitans in Rome they would expect women in leadership, just as the cosmopolitans in greater Seattle would expect women in leadership just like it is in the workplace and marketplace and everywhere else in our public life. For Phoebe and Priscilla, as well as the other women listed, Paul doesn't say that they are only to lead other women or children; there is no such qualifier. Just as the Gospel broke down the barriers between races (Jews and Gentiles) it breaks down every barrier, including those among women and men.

- ³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.
- ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house. ⁶

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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



Priscilla and Aquila (note that the woman was listed first) were in business. We know they traveled because Paul encountered them in other cities during his ministry (likely coordinating their business travel with Paul's missionary travel). They were also missionary house-church planters who were willing to be martyred for the Gospel. The original language indicates that they risked their necks (stuck their necks out) as if they were in danger of being executed.

They figured out how to integrate the Gospel into their business and home.

It reminds me of Albert. We showed Albert's story last week and during the prelude today (if you haven't seen it, check it out on Northshore's Facebook page). Albert figured out a way to integrate his work life at the truck factory with the Gospel, and lives are being changed.



Verse 16 is interesting:

- ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss.
All the churches of Christ send greetings. ⁷

Was anyone greeted with a Holy Kiss this morning? If not, Jeff and Steve in the parking lot may be falling down on their jobs!

Greet one another with a holy kiss.
All the churches of Christ
send greetings.

romans 16:16



⁶ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 16:2-5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 16:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

I haven't seen a lot of holy kissing going on around here; it is generally not part of our culture. But it was an expression of close friendship in Paul's day... the sort of kiss on the cheek that we might see on the sidelines by Olympic gymnasts (at least among the girls).

This was a church who loved one another. They knew each other's names, enjoying deep friendship and partnership.

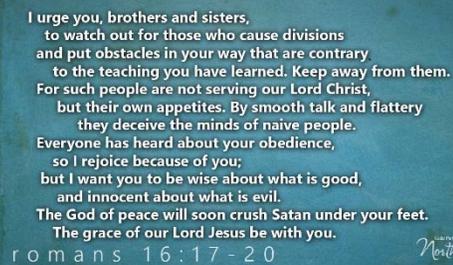
Today marks an important one-year anniversary. Things changed, a lot, one year ago when we started this experiment of essentially merging three churches into two as Jay went over to lead Cedar Park Bothell, many followed him, and I came to lead here, bringing most of Pleasant Bay Church. I say it was an experiment because there were some unique features. It is normal in the life of a church to change pastors. And from time to time there might even be a merger (this was not the first merger in Northshore's history). But this three-into-two strategy all within the Cedar Park system, this was untested.

Whether you were part of that change a year ago, or you have joined us since in the last year, I hope you will agree with me that this has been a success. If we were in a kissing culture, I think there would be a lot of holy kissing going on here. This is a congregation that loves and cares for one another; it is the way it ought to be.

Verse 17 begins one final warning. Of all the warnings that Paul could have given in regard to holiness and worship and theology and such... this is the one final, vital focus:

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. ⁸



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to watch out for those who cause divisions
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romans 16:17-20

THE NORTHSHORE CHURCH

⁸ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 16:17–20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Paul didn't warn about the Devil; in fact he said that Satan would be crushed under our feet.

He didn't warn about the government, or financial collapse.

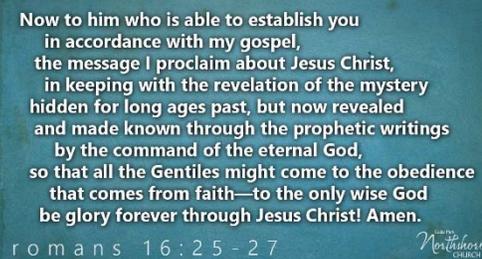
He didn't warn about the influence of the world or outside enemies.

He warned about **religious people**... people who out of their own appetites for power and control serve to divide and put obstacles in the way of believers. These are the inward-focused types who are more concerned about controlling the lives of believers than transforming the lives of unbelievers with the power of the Gospel.

For these people Paul made no room. We are not going to fight among the believers... the only thing we'll fight for is unity.

With verse 25 we have the final paragraph.

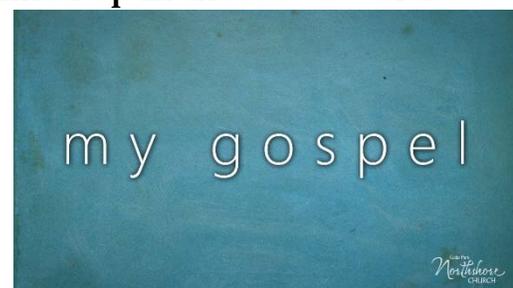
²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. ⁹



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so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience
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be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.
romans 16:25-27
Northshore Church

I promised a big idea at the end and it is summed up in these two words:
my gospel.

What does Paul mean when he says *my gospel*? Does he mean that this is a plan that he created? Or maybe a version of the Gospel that he preaches?



my gospel
Northshore Church

That simply cannot be the case as it would contradict everything else that Paul says about the Gospel.

Then what is he saying?

⁹ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 16:25–27). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

When Paul says *my gospel* it is not a matter of ownership like one who created it, or some sort of claim that he specializes in some customized version of the Gospel. No it is not that Paul owns the Gospel, but it is that the Gospel owns Paul.

When Paul says that the Gospel is *my gospel*, he is proclaiming that whatever his story *was* or *might be...* Paul's story has been replaced with the Good News of the Gospel. Paul is so tightly affiliated with the Gospel that he completely identifies with the Gospel and the Gospel defines him. Thus... *my gospel*.

And so it should be with us all. This is God's plan, that we all would so identify with the Gospel that it becomes my gospel. Whatever our story is, whatever our story was, and whatever our story might be... God's plan is to replace that with the Good News of the Gospel.

Not merely on special occasions or special days like Sunday in a special place like this... but in every way in all our days. Our work and study and leisure should be aligned with and consumed by the Gospel. Our families and networks should be impacted by the Gospel. Our public and private lives, our finances and hobbies and pursuits should all be encompassed by the Gospel.

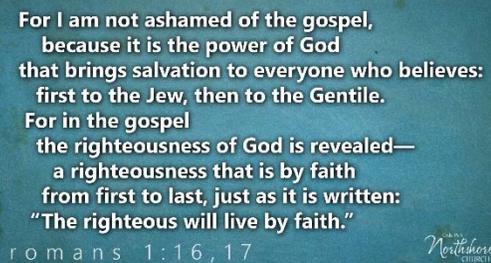
Can we say that the Gospel is *my gospel*?

Is our story the Good News of the Gospel? And if not, what can we do to make it so?

Can we say that with Paul that we are not ashamed of the Gospel... not ashamed of *my Gospel*? Is there some part of your story for which you are ashamed? Make the Gospel your story.

Would you like to stand with me and read these key verses from Romans one last time, and in so doing proclaiming that the Gospel is *my Gospel*?

Not merely reading it out of religious devotion or even to simply go along with the crowd... but proclaiming it as our own.



For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
because it is the power of God
that brings salvation to everyone who believes:
first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.
For in the gospel
the righteousness of God is revealed—
a righteousness that is by faith
from first to last, just as it is written:
"The righteous will live by faith."
romans 1:16, 17

Northshore
CHURCH

This is the Gospel: righteousness is by faith. When we believe in Jesus, we receive this righteous standing before God, and we are enlisted in a new life... a life lived by and for faith.

Lynne is going to lead us in one final song today; it is meant to be a time of response, a time of prayer and reflection... a time of dedication and rededication to the Lord.

Father, give us gifts of courage to lay our stories at the foot of the Cross and faith to claim the Gospel as our story... as my story.

