

Sermon Title: The God Directed Praise of Faithful Members

Sermon Text: Romans 16:1-16

Sermon Purpose: To call the hearer to realize the biblical support and demonstration of active church membership.

Sermon Proposition: There are 3 basic demonstrations of faithful church membership.

Introduction: Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously spoke about cheap grace – that low view of grace which does not lead to strong disciples but those who see no need to actually follow Christ at all.

In the same way, if we have a low view of membership – cheap membership, if you like – we are likely to see the same dynamic. A church that asks and expects nothing of me, who will let me belong without responsibility (or accountability) added to emphasis, cannot be surprised when its members view the whole concept of church membership very, very, cheaply.

(Article: Membership Matters by StephenKNEA/e.com)

“There has been much written on declining attendance in churches. Specifically, many of us have addressed the issue of attendance frequency where even “active” church members attend less frequently.

Many pundits have rightly observed the impact of culture on the church, where church is, at best, just another activity. We have also addressed the issue of increasing choices. Many church members and attendees have so many opportunities to do other activities, and they can often afford them like never before. Still others note the increasing numbers of people working on Sunday, precluding them from attending worship services that day. Even more lament the reality that many children’s sports have been moved to Sundays.

These reasons are sound. But behind many of these reasons are attitudinal issues. These attitudinal issues are really the sources of the problem. And there are four attitudes in particular that have a devastating effect on church attendance.

1. The attitude that church membership is not biblical.
2. The attitude that we are part of a church primarily to get our needs met.
3. The attitude that church leaders are not held to a higher standard.
4. The attitude that expectation of faithful church attendance is legalistic.”

[Four Key Attitudes That Are Killing Church Attendance, <https://thomrainer.com/2018/11/four-key-attitudes-that-are-killing-church-attendance/>]

I. The faithful member is praised for their sanctified service. Vv.1-2

II. The faithful member is praised for their sacrificial service. Vv.3-4

III. The faithful member is praised for their sincere service. Vv.5-16

I. The faithful member is praised for their sanctified service. Vv.1-2

Paul writes to “commend” Phoebe to the Roman Christians. She is a fellow believer, probably a Gentile, and comes from Cenchrea. Phoebe’s name means “bright and radiant” and reflects her life and character. Paul probably knew Phoebe because Cenchrea is only eight miles from Corinth, where Paul had at one time spent 18 months (Acts 18:1-18) and is now staying as he writes to the Romans.

Phoebe is a “servant,” or “deacon.” The word Paul uses here, diakonos, is a word that can be used generally for any Christian, for every Christian is a “servant” or “minister of the risen Lord Jesus Christ”. These servants as “deacons” were often charged with visitation of the sick, poor relief, and possibly financial oversight.

Paul’s reasons for commending Phoebe was threefold:

1. He wants the Roman Christians to “receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints.” This would include receiving her into or among the fellowship, or could mean assisting her to find lodging, food, and basic needs.

2. Paul's second reason for commending Phoebe was to gain assistance in the business she had come to do.
3. Paul's third reason for commending Phoebe, she had been a benefactor of many, and of himself. The Greek word "prostatis" is found only here in Biblical Greek, meaning to:
 - a) care for, give aid to, or
 - b) direct, preside over.
 She was a "Patron" one who came to the aid of others, especially foreigners, by providing housing and financial aid and by representing their interest before local authorities.

II. The faithful member is praised for their sacrificial service. Vv.3-4

Paul greets 26 individuals, two "families," and three "house churches." A public recognition – the request for greetings were probably read aloud to the assembled church – of those Christians in Rome whom Paul already knows would encourage them to think favorably of him and remind the church as a whole of the number of "supporters."

The first individuals to be greeted were a married couple Priscilla and Aquila, a husband and a wife who were known by Paul and would serve to introduce Paul to the Roman church. Paul first served with this couple in Corinth, on his second missionary journey. They were originally from Italy

[**Acts 18:2** And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.],

they also had a trade of tent-making in common with Paul

[**Acts 18:3** So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.],

they were responsible for a new beginning in Ephesus

[**Acts 18:18** So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.].

It is possible that Priscilla was a Gentile and Aquila a Jew.

- A. They were fellow workers. V.3
- B. They had risked their own lives to serve. V.4a
- C. They were appreciated by Paul and the churches of the Gentiles. V.4b
Acts 18:24-26 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. **25** This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. **26** So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

III. The faithful member is praised for their sincere service. Vv.5-16

- A. Notice Paul's commendation to a faithful house church. V.5a
- B. Notice Paul's commendation to a faithful first convert. V.5b
 Epāenetus, was Paul's first convert in Asia Minor, the general area of modern day Turkey. This is the first fruit of Paul's offering of the Gentiles acceptable to the Lord.
- C. Notice Paul's commendation to a faithful female laborer. V.6

- D. Notice Paul's commendation to faithful relatives. V.7
4 characteristics:
1. Kinsman v.7a
 2. fellow prisoners v.7b
 3. outstanding reputation among the apostles v.7c
 4. saved before Paul v.7d
- E. Notice Paul's commendation to faithful slaves. V.8
Many slaves in the imperial household of Cesar had this name. (**Philippians 4:22**)
"In one of the earliest Christian catacombs near Rome, the name Ampliatius can still be seen on a beautifully decorated tomb." [John MacArthur, New Testament Commentary Romans 9-16, p.366]
- F. Notice Paul's commendation for the faithful common and uncommon. V.9
Urbanus was a common Roman name, possible Roman citizen. Unlike the name Urbanus, Stachys, which means "ear of corn," was Greek and uncommon.
- G. Notice Paul's commendation for the faithful in testing. V.10a
Paul recognized Appelles as being approved in Christ. Dokimos (approved) carries the idea of being tried and tested, and was used of precious metals, such as gold, silver that passed tests for purity.
- H. Notice Paul's commendation to a faithful aristocratic household. V.10b-11b
From his careful study of the New Testament, biblical scholar J.B. Lightfoot suggests Aristobulus may have been the brother of Herod Agrippa I and the grandson of Herod the Great.
- I. Notice Paul's commendation to the faithful laborers. V.12a
Here Paul commends 3 women. The first two were possibly sisters, whose names mean "delicate" and "dainty" respectively. They were active faithful workers in the Lord's business and church.
- J. Notice Paul's commendation to a faithful foreigner. V.12b
Persis probably received her name from her native land of Persia. Not only was she the beloved, suggesting (by the definite article "The") she was beloved by everyone who knew her and met her, but she was also one who "worked hard in the Lord." The first two are spoken of in the present tense, possibly stating they were young, while Persis is in the past tense, possibly stating she was an older woman who had already lived out her most productive years of service for the Lord.
- K. Notice Paul's commendation of the faithful extraordinary Christian. V.13
Rufus was an extraordinary Christian who went above and beyond in his love and labor for the Lord, and the Lord's people, the Lord's church.
Mark 15:21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.
Also commended is his mother.
- L. Notice Paul's commendation of the faithful unknown. V.14-15

M. Notice Paul's commendation of the faithful act of mutual acceptance. V.16

1. The practice of kissing friends on the forehead or cheek was common in the Old Testament times. Kissing was common among relatives and close friends, especially after long separation and when they departed.
2. To kiss a person in a high position was a sign of respect and honor. In the New Testament this demonstration continued, even among believers, due to the fact that many who came to Christ and joined the local church were made outcasts by their biological families, the new spiritual relationship of Christians became all the dearer and was regularly demonstrated by what came to be known as a holy kiss. Paul therefore, admonished the early church members in Rome to continue the practice when they greeted one another, to demonstrate mutual acceptance among the family of Christ, the household of God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Acts 20:36-38 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37** Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, **38** sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Luke 7:36-45 Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. **37** And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, **38** and stood at His feet behind *Him* weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil. **39** Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw *this*, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman *this is* who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." **40** And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." **41** "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** "And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" **43** Simon answered and said, "I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." **44** Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. **45** "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in.