

## The Church as a Gospel Community

### Gospel Culture – Part 18

Romans 16

David Sunday

June 3, 2018

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We turn today to the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 16. Our journey through this letter—and alongside this letter, through the book of Genesis—began over three years ago. We had stops along the way, but today we come to the end of the journey.

It may seem anticlimactic to come to the end of a great letter like Romans and hear a list of names and greetings. But it's actually a beautiful picture of what Paul talked about at the beginning of this letter, when he said the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Now we see some specific names and faces of people who have believed and whose lives have been transformed by the gospel.

As I read these names in this chapter, I want you to imagine that you're there in the church at Rome. See the people gathering together for worship. See them exchanging greetings, smiling and laughing with one another. Then they sing praises to God, probably out of the book of Psalms. They hear this letter read to them, then someone explains it and exhorts them. They discuss what they've heard from the Word of God through the Apostle Paul.

Then they come to the Lord's Table, like we will do today, and they experience God's blessing. And then they go out into the world. Some of them are going to seal their testimony with their own blood. This is a powerful picture of the life that God creates through His gospel, the community that is created through His grace in the gospel. Romans 16 is a wonderful illustration of that kind of community—the community God creates when the gospel transforms people's lives.

So think about that. Imagine that you're there, as I begin reading this chapter at verse one:

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup> 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 many and of myself as well.*

<sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. <sup>6</sup> Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. <sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup> Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. <sup>10</sup> Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup> Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. <sup>12</sup> Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. <sup>14</sup> Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. <sup>15</sup> Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. <sup>16</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. <sup>22</sup> I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

<sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> 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— <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Praise You, Lord, for Your living Word, for the lives that are transformed by Your gospel.  
Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing now in Your

sight. We ask for Your Holy Spirit's help as we come before You in Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

In the Black Hills of South Dakota stands a monument designed to be the largest carved piece of stone in the world. I'm not talking Mt. Rushmore. I'm talking about Crazy Horse, which was started in 1948. It was planned to be the largest sculpture in the world: a massive Native American warrior, sitting astride a great galloping horse. It was intended to be 640 feet long, 564 feet high—but right now it's just the face of Crazy Horse. His body hasn't been started yet. Neither has the horse.

The head of Crazy Horse is immense in its grandeur and significance. His face right now is almost 50% larger than the faces of the Presidents on Mt. Rushmore. His eyes are 17 feet wide. Can you imagine how enormous and impressive the body of that head will be, if they ever complete the body? You can sense the wonder of the yet-incomplete body by gazing upon the glory of the head.

So it is with the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Andrew Wilson says:

The church is like Crazy Horse. She is incomplete. Much of her remains to be carved out of the mountainside. The parts which have already been chiseled look rough, awkward, shapeless, messy. Looking at the church from a purely human perspective, you wonder—will she ever be finished? Yet her head is finished. Christ is the head of His church and He is magnificent.

When you take your eyes away from what's awkward and messy in the church and get them back on Christ, the Head, you realize there's something wonderful about His church. There's something wonderful about His body and about the work He is doing through His people. Friends, the body of Christ is destined for glory. We are betrothed to Christ as His bride and we will be radiant and spotless when He returns to claim us for an eternal marriage full of bliss and delight.

So don't let the present unfinished, sometimes rough, sometimes awkward state of life in the local church discourage you. Remember to Whom we're connected. Remember, Christ is our Head. See Him in all His glory and realize that, by His grace, He's going to make His church magnificent.

That's the key to understanding what Paul is doing here in this list of names. I want you to look in your Bible and notice how frequently Paul repeats the phrase "in the Lord" or "in Christ" or "in Jesus." It's there in verse two, "*welcome [Phoebe] in the Lord.*" We see it in verse three, "*fellow workers in Christ Jesus.*" We see it in verse five, "*Epaenetus, who was the first*

*convert to Christ in Asia.*” Keep looking down. You’ll see it in each of verses seven through 11, , twice in verse 12 and also in verse 13.

Friends, that’s the key to all these names. Here is a community united to Christ. He is the Head, they are His body and His grace is flowing through them. They don’t realize how significant their efforts are. Their labors for the most part seem very ordinary to them. But Jesus is among them. They are connected to the Lord Jesus. He’s working through them. He’s making their ordinary, common lives full of eternal significance. They’re a cloud of witnesses for us (Hebrews 12:1-3). They’re testifying to us that whenever a community of people is connected to the Lord Jesus Christ, God is doing a lasting work there. God is doing a work that will bear fruit for all eternity.

This is a community shaped by the gospel, and that’s what the church is. If you want to experience the beauty and blessings of life in the church, friends, you’ve got to dive in wholeheartedly. You’ve got to join in. You can’t just dip your toes in the water. You’ve got to get immersed in the life of the church. You can’t just date the church. You have to say, “I’m married to her. I’m committed.”

Sometimes people say, “Well, I’m committed to the Kingdom of God, but not to the local church. The local church is a mess.” That’s like saying, “You know what? I’m committed to the institution of marriage, but not to my wife. That’s too difficult.” If you’re committed to the Kingdom, then get committed to the local church, because the local church is where His Kingdom is shown and seen and on display in the world. So let’s look at the kinds of people who build up this gospel community called the church. Don’t you want to be the kind of person who builds up what God is doing here at New Covenant?

Let’s ask God the Holy Spirit to make us such a people for His glory. It takes four qualities that we’re going to see in this passage. I’m going to give you all of them in W’s: work, warmth, watchfulness and worship. Ask God to make you someone who works hard in the service of the gospel, who warmly loves your gospel family, who watches vigilantly in gospel warfare, and who wholeheartedly worships the God Who strengthens us according to His gospel. Let’s look at these four qualities as they’re seen here in this chapter.

### **Work: Gospel work is hard (Romans 16:1-16).**

It’s clear that there’s a cost to serving Christ together. There’s toil. It can be joyful toil, but it’s work.

Look at Phoebe in verses one and two. What does he call her? A servant. A *diakonos*. It’s the same word that’s used for deacons. We cannot be sure if Phoebe had a formal role as a female deacon in the church at Cenchreae, but we do know in early church history that the office

of deacons and deaconesses is well documented. Phoebe is working hard, like the deacons of our church do, to serve the body. Paul says she's been a patron of many. She's a woman of means—perhaps someone who has her own business. She is using her wealth and resources to build up the church and advance the gospel. Paul says, “Phoebe is a great help. She's working hard.”

He tells them, “*Welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints.*” She's coming from Cenchreae to Rome. Many people believe that she's the one who's actually delivering Paul's letter to the Romans to them. That's why he's commending her and saying, “Welcome her.” Wouldn't that be a privilege—to be the messenger who brings the letter to the Roman church for the first time and to share that letter with the church? What a treasure that would be. So that's Phoebe. She's working hard.

Then look at verses three and four—Prisca and Aquila. We know they're a wife and husband team. We know they were very knowledgeable in the Scriptures—we see that in the book of Acts. They worked hard. Paul calls them “*my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.*” They risked their lives for Paul. They put their neck on the line for him and he's never going to forget that. He's always going to be grateful to them.

Then in verse six he mentions Mary, saying she “*has worked hard for you.*”

In verse seven he speaks of Andronicus and Junia—again, most likely a husband and wife team. They are fellow Jews—Paul calls them “*my kinsmen*”—and they are fellow prisoners. They have suffered for the gospel. Paul says in the ESV translation, “*They are well known to the apostles,*” but there's a footnote that says, “Or among the apostles.”

Sometimes in the New Testament Paul is not referring to the formal office of Apostle like he and Peter and James and John hold—the people who saw the risen Christ and who speak with authority. Rather, these are probably those who are sent out from the church as missionaries, what we might say are “small a” apostles. They were sent out to be church planters and missionaries. If that is what Paul is saying about Andronicus and Junia, he's saying they've been outstanding in their work for the sake of the gospel.

Then look at verse nine—Urbanus. What does Paul call him? “*Our fellow worker in Christ.*”

Or how do you like verse 12? If you're going to have twins, this would be a great pair of names: Tryphaena and Tryphosa, “*those workers in the Lord.*” And Persis, “*who has worked hard in the Lord.*” See, most of these people weren't full-time Christian workers. This wasn't their vocation. They weren't paid to do this work. But they are serving for the advancement of the gospel. This is their big aim in life. It takes a team for us to be the kind of church that advances the gospel. It takes many people, working together, laboring hard.

So as I read these names, I think of people like our deacons, laboring tirelessly to minister to the needs of our church and community. I think of our children's ministry workers—Sunday School, Awana. I just read Tracy Holloway's vocational development plan for this summer. She has an ambitious list of things she wants to get done for the children's ministry, to take it to another level here in our church. These servants are working hard in the Lord.

I think of our sign language time, those like Susan here, who are translating into another language while I speak. Or the Friendship Class in the back. I think of those who put together the communion trays, or the meals ministry in our church. Raise your hand if you've ever received a meal from someone in our church at a time when you were in need. How many of you have ever received a meal? That's lots of cooking, lots of serving, lots of work in the Lord.

I think about our counseling team, small groups leaders, administrative team, security team, ushers, greeters, those who are working in prison ministry, bringing meals to Lazarus House, leading Bible studies with people in your workplace, doing one-to-one Bible reading for the purpose of building up disciples.

Friends, this is what you need to understand. Your labor in the Lord is not in vain (2 Corinthians 15:58). You might feel like it's not noticed, or that it's not worthwhile, but Romans 16 is a tribute to the fact that Jesus is the One Who's empowering you to do that work. You are working "in Him." You are working for Him. And even if you feel like your work doesn't matter, Romans 16 is saying, "Think again—it does." Most of these names you're never going to see in the Bible again, but their works are recorded as a testimony to the fact that anything that is done in the name of Christ will last for eternity. It will bear fruit.

Now, if you're someone who's content to let others do the heavy lifting, let this list of names reprove you. Paul expected all hands on deck. He expected everyone who's part of the body of Christ to get active in serving the Lord Jesus and advancing His gospel. Sometimes we get into a funk. We feel kind of disengaged from the church. We feel like, "Ah, I don't really have any friends here." Maybe it feels cold and unwelcoming. What's the best remedy for that? Throw yourself into the work of the Lord. Get involved in service. My best friends in life are the people I have served alongside of in ministry. That's where the bond of fellowship and friendship is strengthened and developed.

I love how C.S. Lewis puts this:

Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever about their friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest. This is why pathetic people who simply "want friends" can never make any. The very condition of having friends is

that we should want something else besides friends....Friendship  
must be about something.

In this church at Rome, they're all about the work of Christ and the gospel. They're giving themselves to that work and, as a result, they are in deep friendship and fellowship with one another. So if you want real friends in the church, dive in. Get involved. Work hard. Share in a passion to grow disciples who are making disciples of others. That's how friendship grows—through work in the Lord. That's the first quality.

**Warmth: Gospel fellowship is warm-hearted and affectionate (Romans 16:1-16). \***

Gospel fellowship is warm-hearted and affectionate. Do you hear that in the tone of Paul's writing—just how much he loves these people?

Verses three and four—Prisca and Aquila. Paul is never going to forget them and what they've done for him.

Verse five—Epaenetus. Look at what Paul calls him (I believe is a man). Paul calls him “my beloved, my dear friend, whom I love.”

He says the same thing about Ampliatus in verse eight: “*My beloved in the Lord.*” And Stachys in verse nine, “*beloved.*” Persis in verse 12.

Then I love what Paul says in verse 13 about Rufus. Do you know that Rufus was the name of one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross of Jesus? Many think that this Rufus is the son of the man who carried Jesus' cross. So his mother would have been the wife of Simon of Cyrene. Paul says, “Rufus' mom—she's become a mom to me as well.”

I have the best mom in the world who lives in Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin. I love my mom. But through the church, I have many mothers in the Lord—older women who demonstrate the love and maternal care of Christ for His body. It's a beautiful thing that he says about Rufus' mother. There's great tenderness and affection here.

Notice how diverse this group of people is. They were diverse in race. Some of them are Jews as we see in verses seven and 11—they were Paul's kinsmen. Others were Gentiles. They were diverse in rank. Some of them came from high social status. Aristobulus in verse ten was probably the grandson of Herod the Great and he a friend of the emperor Claudius. Narcissus was a rich man who was known to have great influence with the emperor. Then there are other names like Ampliatus, Urbanus, Hermas, Philologus, Julia—those are common names for slaves. These people were diverse in rank.

Then there is great diversity in gender. Notice among all the names mentioned, nine of them are women. Notice that when Paul says someone worked very hard, it's almost always—if

not always—a woman he’s talking about. The women are the ones who are working hard. He gets to some of these guys names and he just starts listing them: “Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas...” You know, just a list of guys. But for the women he stops and says, “They worked hard in the Lord.” Paul is celebrating the ministry of women in the church. They worked hard. They exercised influence. They’re valued partners to Paul.

Anyone who thinks that the Apostle Paul is anti-woman needs to read Romans 16 and see how he valued these women as his equals, as dear partners in his ministry. The early church preacher Chrysostom said, “The women of that time were more zealous than lions, sharing with the apostles in their labor.” These women and men share deep friendships, forged by this common desire to advance the gospel. They were diverse, but they were deeply unified in the bonds of love and affection. That’s why in verse 16, Paul urges them, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss.*”

How do you feel about that? Shall we go out of church today doing that? You might wish he had said, “Greet one another with a hearty handshake” or something like that. That’s the way the British guy J.B. Phillips paraphrases this: “Greet one another with a hearty handshake.” But Paul says, “A holy kiss.” Has anyone ever been to the church in Spain and see how they greet one another, kissing on either side? I had Alfonso and Linda Morano-Santa demonstrate this in the first service today. Nathan and Patsy are getting ready to go to Spain tomorrow, so we were instructing people to kiss Nathan a lot in the service this morning.

It’s an expression of affection. It’s hard to do that for people you don’t care for. But the question is, friends, do your fellow Christians know that you love them? Do they know that you have in your heart a warm-hearted tenderness toward them? Do you ever say it? Do you ever express how deeply you love your fellow Christians in Christ? I hope you know that and feel that from me. You are dearly loved to me. The bond we have in Christ is deep and warm with affection.

One of my aims this morning is to encourage you to join a small group, which we’re now calling a Gospel Communities. Over the last several months we’ve been rebooting these groups, training and raising up new leaders. They will all be in the foyer today after the service to talk with you about how you can become engaged in one of these Gospel Communities. I really believe, if you want to grow as a disciple who is making disciples of others, you’ve got to somehow get face to face, side to side, in relationship with other Christians, people who are going to know you well enough to know how to challenge you, how to comfort you and how to partner with you in ministry. I think that involves more than simply gathering with the church on Sunday mornings.

Eric Geiger who works for LifeWay Research and he just reported some of the findings after ten years of research on the subject of discipleship. What did he find? This was released just last week. Two things on his list stood out to me. Number one, he said, “Reading the Bible matters more than anything else if you want to grow as a disciple.” So getting together with other believers, reading the Bible and talking about it is probably the single most important thing we can do to grow as disciples of Jesus.

But there was another thing Eric Geiger observed after ten years of research and it’s this: “Groups matter a lot,” he said. Those who are in some type of group—Sunday School, small group, etc.—are much more likely to display markers of spiritual growth than those who are not in a group. So why do we have small groups in our church? It’s so that we can be very intentional about engaging with our church’s purpose and mission in each other’s lives. We join small groups because we don’t simply want to blend in with the crowd on Sunday mornings. We join small groups because we want to be relationally engaged with one another. We need these relationships in order to grow.

You are not a lone ranger Christian who’s going to grow alone. You need brothers and sisters, or else you’re not going to grow. You will be cared for in a small group. You will grow as a disciple.

We join small groups also because we need to be joined with other Christians who have gifts that differ from our own, so that we can partner together in serving our community in the mission of Christ. This is one of the elements we really emphasize in our Gospel Community training. Our small groups are about us finishing the commission Jesus has given us as His disciples.

We also want to be engaged in God’s mission strategy together. We’re going to be praying for our neighbors, our communities, the nations, looking for ways together to reach out to those who don’t yet know Christ. As we often sing here, “Reaching out to those in darkness—church, arise.”

Friends, I want our church to be stronger in the next generation and in the generation after that than it is right now. I don’t want our church to last just ten more years. I want it to last 50 or 100 more years. But in order for that to happen, we have to continually be engaged on mission. We can’t just think about us in here. We’ve got to always be thinking about the world out there, because a church that’s not engaged on mission is going to die after one generation. You’ve got to be reproducing. If we don’t engage on mission, we don’t really deserve to be around the next generation and the generation after that.

So one of the things we’re doing in our Gospel Communities is really helping one another think about our mission field here in the Fox Valley. The real proof will be after you’ve been in

one of these groups for a year. Will have you experienced something there that's helping you grow and helping you be on mission better as a disciple of Christ? We want you to experience the fullness of the blessing of the community that's shaped by the gospel.

Listen, you don't have to join a small group to do that. We're not trying to create another legalism here. There may be reasons why you can't join a small group. But you do have to find a way to be deeply connected to the body of Christ. One of my great concerns for us as a suburban church is how easy it is to come year after year after year and never go deeper in relationships with one another, never actively engage with our neighbors. Our suburban culture is designed to keep us all isolated and independent. So we have to work at this together. We've got to be intentional about this.

Somehow we've got to find a way to be deeply connected to the body of Christ and I believe one of the most fruitful ways to get connected is to join a small group. Stop in the foyer after this service and talk to some of the leaders about joining one of these groups.

**Watchfulness: The gospel community is threatened, so we must be watchful  
(Romans 16:17-23).**

So work together, express warmth with one another—and let's real quickly look at the rest of this— watchfulness. One of the things Patrick and Alicia have emphasized in our training is that there is going to be spiritual warfare. As we engage together to advance the mission of Christ, Satan is going to fight against us. In verses 17-20, Paul warns us. There are going to be people who are about themselves and not about the gospel of Christ. They're serving their own appetites. They're going to teach things that are contrary to the gospel. They're doing this for themselves. *"Such persons do not serve our Lord Christ"* (verse 18). They're full of smooth talk and flattery to deceive the hearts of the naïve.

Paul wants us as believers to be innocent, but he doesn't want us to be naïve. He wants us to be discerning enough to know that there are certain types of people we need to avoid (verse 17). Avoid divisive people. Avoid doctrines that are going to be divisive. Any doctrine that's contrary to the gospel will divide. We have to reject that. We have to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

I just love verse 20. This is a great promise for us: *"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."* Aren't you looking forward to the day when there's no more warfare, when Christ reigns over all and His enemies are made a footstool under His feet? Jesus struck the decisive blow against Satan when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. Satan hasn't

yet conceded his defeat. Jesus wants His church to share in His victory. Paul says, “Look forward to this.”

As you gather together in fellowship as believers, you’re going to be engaged in spiritual warfare—but God is going to be crushing Satan under your feet. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you.”

**Worship: The aim of the gospel is to bring everlasting glory to God in Christ alone (Romans 16:25-27).**

Now let’s look at the last W—worship. Work, warmth, watchfulness, worship—that’s where the book of Romans ends. It ends with worship. “*To him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...*” Friends, the gospel is powerful to establish us—not just to save us, but to establish us as believers. Notice the difference here at the end of Romans from what Paul said at the beginning of Romans. He said in Romans 1:16 that the gospel of God “*is the power of God for salvation.*” Here he says it’s for believers to be strengthened, to be established. So we always need the gospel.

I like how Tim Keller puts it: “The gospel is not only the entry point into the Christian life; it is also the way we continue in, grow in and enjoy life with Christ.”

What is the gospel? It can be summarized in the name of a Person: Jesus Christ. He is the gospel. As He is preached, we go deeper and deeper and deeper into the soil of the gospel. As we get established, we become stronger.

Friends, we need to gather together so that we can see Christ in all the Scriptures. Look at how Paul puts it in verse 25. This is a “*...mystery that was kept secret for long ages.*” Prophets and people were searching through the Old Testament, saying, “Who is this pointing to?” They were longing to see. Angels were longing to see what has now been disclosed to us (1 Peter 1:12). Christ has been revealed to us. We see Him throughout the Old Testament in the prophetic writings. He’s being made known to all the nations of the earth.

But it’s only through faith in Him that we can grow in obedience. The only kind of obedience that God is interested in is obedience that comes through faith in Christ. God doesn’t want our works. He doesn’t want our duties. He wants faith in His Son, then the love, joy, peace and obedience that flows out of that faith brings glory to God.

So Paul ends his letter with the goal of everything. The goal of everything in the universe is that “*the only wise God*” would receive glory and honor forever and ever through Jesus Christ, through His church. That’s where we end today. As we come to the Communion Table this morning, I want us to come with an attitude of praise and worship to this great God. I want you

to think about what God intends to do here at this Table for each of us. He intends to strengthen us. As we take this bread and drink this cup, He wants us to be nourished and built up in the truth of the gospel.

I want you to think about what Romans has showed us. It has shown us in chapter one that God is the Creator of all things and that we have ignored His glory. We have not given Him thanks, so God's wrath is being revealed against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Who is included in that? All of us. There's none righteous—no, not one (Romans 3:9-20). All have turned aside. Together, we've all become worthless. Our throats are open graves. We use our tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under our lips. The way of peace we have not known. We are all guilty as sinners before God.

But Romans 1:17 says, "But now a righteousness from God has been revealed—the righteousness that is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), but God has put forward Christ as a propitiation (3:25) —a sacrifice—Who turns away wrath so that everyone who believes in Him now has peace with God. There's nothing standing between us and the Father, if we put our trust in Jesus. Our guilt is removed. Our shame is covered. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Though we still struggle and wrestle with sin, it no longer rules our lives. There is no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus.

This is the gospel and God says we are strengthened by that gospel. He gives us this bread and this cup to be tangible symbols to us. We need these tangible symbols so that we can by faith feast on Jesus Christ together.

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## New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

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Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)