

Sermon #156 — Romans Series

Title: **WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?**

Text: Romans 16:1-20

Subject: *Characteristics of Believers*

Date: Sunday Morning — September 16, 2018

Reading: *Philippians 2:1-16*

(Philippians 2:1-16) If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, (2) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. (3) *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

(5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (6) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

(9) Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: (10) That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; (11) And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(12) Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (13) For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. (14) Do all things without murmurings and disputings: (15) That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; (16) Holding forth the word of life;

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

INTRODUCTION

More than 40 years ago, as I sat in a waiting room at Duke University Hospital in Durham, NC, waiting for my daily cobalt treatment, I was reading a book by J. C. Ryle titled, *The True Christian*. Just as I was called in for my appointment, a gentleman sitting next to me asked, **“What does it take to be a true Christian?”** I do not think I was ever asked that question before. And I do not think I have been asked since, “What does it take to be a true Christian.” I only had a few seconds to answer the man. I would have said much more if I had had more time. But the answer I gave him I would give him today.

“What does it take to be a true Christian?” Are you interested in that? “What does it take to be a true Christian?” This is the answer I gave to that man more

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

than forty years ago — **“Nothing from you, but all of you.”** Christianity is something more than being religious, going to church, doing good, making a decision for Jesus, saying a prayer, or saying I believe in Jesus.

Proposition: Christianity is the utter surrender of my life to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. — Christianity is bowing to the Son of God in the obedience of faith. — Christianity is giving myself to Christ as my Lord, my Master, my God, my King.

If you would be saved, believe on the Son of God. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ, and salvation is yours. — Will you trust my Savior? O Spirit of God, give these poor, immortal souls life and faith in Christ. **The Lord God himself calls you to Christ.** The Father calls you. The Son calls you. The Spirit calls you. **The Triune God calls you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, promising mercy, grace, salvation, eternal life to all who believe on the Son of God** (Isaiah 45:22; 55:1-3, 6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:16-17; Acts 16:31; John 3:36).

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

(Isaiah 45:22) Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.

(Isaiah 55:1-3) Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (2) Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. (3) Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David.

(Isaiah 55:6-8) Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: (7) Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

(Matthew 11:28-30) Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and *ye* shall find rest unto your souls. (30) For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

(Revelation 22:16-17) I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star. (17) And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

(Acts 16:31) Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

(John 3:36) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and God's salvation is yours. If this moment you believe on the Son of God, you do this moment freely and gladly give over the rule of your life to Christ the Lord. Anything less than utter surrender to Christ the Lord is not faith in Christ, but a satanic delusion. — This is what the Lord Jesus Christ tells us.

(Matthew 16:24-26) If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (25) For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (26) For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

If you would be clothed, you've got to be stripped.
— If you would be lifted up, you've got to be laid low.
— If you would save your life, you've got to lose it.
— If you would live, you've got to die.
— If you would be free, you've got to bow to Christ's yoke.

(Mark 8:34-37) Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. (35) For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. (36) For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (37) Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

(Luke 14:25-33) And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, (26) If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (27) And whosoever

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? (29) Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, (30) Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? (32) Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (33) So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN? — That is the question I want to address in this message. I have no hope of adequately answering the question, but I do want to address it. — **WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?**

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

A Christian is a person who is like Christ.

- In Doctrine
- In Character
- In Conduct

Many years ago, **Samuel Davies** (the fourth president of Princeton University) wrote a song for his slaves which became very popular among them. In fact, it remains a very popular song in black churches today. The song goes like this...

“Lord, I want to be a Christian
In my heart.

Lord, I want to be a Christian
In my heart.

In my heart, in my heart,
Lord, I want to be a Christian,
Lord, I want to be a Christian,
Lord, I want to be a Christian,
In my heart.”

Lord, I want to be like Jesus
In my heart.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

Lord, I want to be like Jesus
In my heart.

In my heart, in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus,
Lord, I want to be a Christian,
In my heart.”

I cannot think of better words to express the longing of my soul and the desire of my heart.

“Lord, I want to be a Christian,
In my heart.”

If you are God’s, I know that is you desire as well. — **WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?** Perhaps the best way for me to address that question is by pointing you to some people held before us by God the Holy Ghost as examples of Christianity. We are given a pretty lengthy list of exemplary men and women, named by divine inspiration, in the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Romans.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

PHOEBE

1st — **A Christian is a woman like “Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church”** (vv. 1-2).

What a great, remarkable, honorable way to introduce one Christian to another. Paul sent this letter to the church at Rome by this woman named Phoebe and introduced her to them with these words. —

(Romans 16:1-2) I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: (2) That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

It was common in the early church for churches and pastors to send letters of commendation with faithful men and women going to another place (2 Corinthians 3:1). And that is what Paul does here.

- Phoebe was a believer, a child of God, a sister in Christ.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

- She was a faithful member of the Church at Cenchrea (a pagan, idolatrous city), about nine miles from Corinth.
- And she was a servant of the church there.

She was not a teacher, an exhorter, or a preacher. She was not an evangelist, a missionary, or a pastor. She was not a deacon, or a usurper of authority over men. Had she been any of those things she would not have been a servant of the church but a sore in the church. **The Word of God forbids...**

- Female Preachers
- Female Pastors
- Female Deacons
- Female Authority (1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

(1 Corinthians 14:33-34) For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (34) Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. (35)

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

(1 Timothy 2:11-12) Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. (12) But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Phoebe wasn't a talker, but a doer. She was busy, not a busybody. Phoebe was one of those Marthas by whom the church of God is faithfully served. How I thank God for "*much serving*" Marthas! — A Christian is a woman like "*Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church*"

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

2nd — **Christians are people like Priscilla and Aquila who lay down their lives in the cause of Christ** (vv. 3-5).

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

(Romans 16:3-5) Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: (4) Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (5) Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house.

What a couple they must have been! They were expelled from Rome by Claudius Caesar because of their companionship with the Apostle Paul, helping him by giving him a part of their business as tent makers.

- They were well-known among the Gentile churches for their generosity and assistance to so many.
- They took God's servants into their home regularly.
- They took Apollos into their home for a good while and were used of God to teach him the way of the Lord more perfectly.
- They maintained a regularly assembled local church in their house.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

- Aquila and Priscilla were a wealthy couple with a large, thriving business that reached throughout the Roman Empire, who laid down their lives in the cause of Christ. — They were truly Christ’s witnesses in their generation.

Christians are people like Priscilla and Aquila who lay down their lives in the cause of Christ

EPAENETUS

3rd — What is a Christian. **A Christian is a person like Epaenetus, “firstfruits unto Christ”** (v. 5).

(Romans 15:5) Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

Epaenetus was the first person living in his part of Achaia to be converted to Christ by God’s saving grace. Being the firstfruits, he was the promise of more to come. This man, Epaenetus, we are told by

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

historians, was chosen by the Lord Jesus as one of the first 70 disciples sent out to preach the gospel. — So it is with all who are born of God.

- You were the first one in your sphere to be born of God. — In Your Family — In Your Circle of Friends — In Your School — In Your Place of Business — In Your Nation
- The firstfruits are promise of more. So “*let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called*” (1 Corinthians 7:20).

MARY

4th — **A Christian is “Mary who bestowed much labor on us”** (v. 6).

We read of many in Scripture whose name was Mary. But we know nothing at all about this Mary except this.

- Mary bestowed much labor upon God’s servants.
- She bestowed much labor upon the saints of God in the Church at Rome.

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

What a blessed history! What a great biography! What is a Christian? A Christian is one who labors for others, one who looks not on his own things but upon the things of others. A Christian is a person who makes it his/her business to take care of the needs of other people.

IN CHRIST

5th— What is a Christian? In verses 7-16, Paul sends warm, personal greetings to many others, identifying them as Christians by the fact that they were and are “in Christ.”

(Romans 16:7) Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (8) Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. (9) Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. (10) Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' *household*. (11) Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

household of Narcissus, which are **in the Lord**. (12) Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, **who labour in the Lord**. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much **in the Lord**. (13) Salute Rufus **chosen in the Lord**, and his mother and mine. (14) Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them. (15) Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the **saints** which are with them. (16) Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

Here are five things true of all who are Christians. If I am a Christian, these five things are true of me. If you are a Christian, these five things are true of you.

1. If you are a Christian, you are **“in Christ”** (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Ephesians 1:3-7).
2. If you are a Christian, you are **“beloved”** (v. 8).
— Beloved of God! — Beloved of One Another!

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

3. If you are a Christian, you are “**approved in Christ**” (v. 10). — Approved of by God! — Approved of by God’s People!
4. If you are a Christian, you are “**chosen**” (v. 13; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-4).
5. If we are Christians, we are “**saints**” (v. 15). — Holy People! — God’s People! — Peculiar People!

ONE DOCTRINE

6th — What is a Christian? **A Christian is a person who will not and cannot be moved away from the doctrine of the gospel** (vv. 17-19).

(Romans 16:17) Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (18) For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (19) For your obedience is come abroad unto all *men*. I am glad therefore on

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

- The doctrine we believe is the doctrine we have learned as people taught of God.
- The doctrine we believe is the doctrine we have learned by experience. — **We have learned it by obedience, by “the obedience of faith”** (v. 26).
- Our doctrine is simple — Christ. — “*The Doctrine of Christ*” — One Lord! — One Faith! — One Baptism! — “*The Common Salvation!*”

AT PEACE

7th — What is a Christian? **A Christian is a person at peace because he who is our God is “the God of peace”** (v. 20).

(Romans 16:20) And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

- The Peace of Propitiation!

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

- The Peace of Pardon!
- The Peace of Providence!
- The Peace of Promise!

(Romans 16:20) And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

Grace

8th — What is a Christian? **A Christian is a person with whom the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ abides.** — “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*” (v. 20).

(1 Peter 1:2) Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (3) Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

Romans 16:1-20

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Illustration: *“Chief give himself to Jesus.”*

Amen.