

Romans: Chapter Sixteen

Romans 15.14-16.27: EPILOGUE (Righteousness Reflected)

Romans 16 is largely a record of Paul's personal greetings to many of the saints in Rome. In no way is this an anti-climax to the epistle. Martin Luther did not even comment on the chapter, saying it wasn't worthy of the nobility of the Romans. He was wrong. First, Romans 16 is proof of the **fruit** of the gospel. The plethora of individuals prove the doctrine of the gospel is not just theory. It is the power of God unto salvation – it is effective, and has lost none of its power! Second, Romans 16 is proof of the **fellowship** of the gospel. Some names here are male, others female. Some are slaves, other nobles. Some are Greek, others Latin and Jewish. Yet *all* are brought together in the same breath. Individuals that would never normally sit or stand together in service are shoulder to shoulder. This is the Christian family. And what an interest God has in families! He saves husband and wife (v.3, 15); a son and a mother (v.13); a brother and a sister (v.15), cf. Acts 16.31.

The chapter also illustrates the character of the apostle Paul. He was no lone-ranger, speaking affectionately of his co-workers (v.3, 9). Believers are labourers together (synergy) under God's direction (1 Corinthians 3.9). Paul's great heart of affection for the saints is also on display. He knows them all by name (cf. John 10.3), and is able to commend an aspect of their service. *Smith: Though so highly gifted as an Apostle, in the largeness of his heart, he delights to recognise others in the service of the Lord. With the Apostle there was no unworthy pettiness that, in a spirit of jealousy, seeks to exalt self by belittling others. Nor does he think so highly of himself as to treat any kindness as simply his due.*

The Service of a Sister (16.1-2)

v.1: Phoebe is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. Her name means 'bright' or 'radiant' and derives from the name of a pagan moon goddess. Yet, the grace of God has made her shine as a bright beacon of Christian witness. She lived and belonged to the church in Cenchrea (one of the sea ports of Corinth, located seven miles east of the city) and was travelling to Rome for business. She was probably the bearer of the epistle. Phoebe was a 'sister' in the Lord and a 'servant' (*diakonos*) of the church. Although only used in relation to a sister once (here), *diakonos* is applicable to any Christian and simply denotes various forms of service (1 Peter 4.10), or one who ministers to the needs of others. There is no justification for calling Phoebe a deaconess, neither did she hold some kind of official position. Rather she was busy in the work and service of the assembly. **v.2:** The word 'succourer' (lit. 'to stand before') suggests that her service was that of a patron. This was usually a prominent and wealthy person who used their resources to help others, often in the way of hospitality. This would have been a much needed sphere of service in the busy port of Cenchrea. Paul 'commends' (lit. 'to stand with') her to the saints in Rome and requests they 'receive her in the Lord', i.e. to the full fellowship of the local assembly (different to 14.1 and 15.7 which is social reception to one's table). They are to give her a welcome fitting of her standing as a saint (contrast 16.17) and give her any assistance (lit. 'to stand by') she might need in her business. In essence Paul says, 'stand by her because she has stood up for many'.

These verses are an excellent example of a letter of commendation. Such letters were common in the ancient world as travellers often depended on the assistance of people they had never met. A letter of introduction from someone known to the host was therefore valuable. Such a practice is scriptural and necessary when believers visit or move to another local church (cf. Acts 18.27; 2 Corinthians 3.1-3; 3 John 8-9). Generally, the assembly commends and receives (although here it is a personal, apostolic recommendation). Such letters are beneficial because they assure the person commended, and those receiving them, of the confidence of the saints. They also safeguard against one under discipline coming amongst the people of God. **Newell:** *Since each local assembly is a temple of God and not a social club it is vital that holiness of doctrine and behaviour be maintained.* A believer is received to the full fellowship (privileges and responsibilities) of the assembly, not merely the breaking of bread.

Salutations to the Saints (16.3-16)

This section of Romans 16 is often referred to as a miniature *bema* (judgment seat). Many believers in Rome are found worthy by the Holy Spirit to have their names placed alongside the precious truths of this epistle. Every believer, no exceptions, must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (14.10; 2 Corinthians 5.10). If the apostle was commending saints in our locality, would we make the list? What would be said about us? Paul salutes 26 individuals (24 by name including *nine* women), *two* families and *three* churches meeting in houses. If Paul has condemned mankind under three groups in 1.18-3.8, now the fruit of the gospel is in evidence in the same three groups. Both individuals from the sons of Ham (Barbarian, v.13), sons of Japheth (civilised Gentiles, vv.4-5) and sons of Shem (Jews, v.7, 11) are recorded.

Sometimes a term of *association* is appended, e.g. ‘my helpers’ (v.3). On other occasions it is a term of *appreciation*, or *approval* for what they have done, e.g. ‘labour in the Lord’ (v.12). There are also terms of *affection* such as ‘beloved’ (v.8). By far the most frequent appendage is ‘in the Lord’ or ‘in Christ’ which is a beautiful expression of the unity of the Christian family to which they *all* now belong. Each one is *secure* in Christ and *submitted* to His Lordship. *Galatians 3.28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* And what a variety there is in terms of service. Some risk their lives for the cause of Christ (v.4), others labour to the point of exhaustion (v.12). One has acted as a spiritual mother (v.13), others are given to hospitality (v.23).

- **Priscilla** [ancient, primitive] and **Aquila** [I shall be nourished, immovable], **vv.3-5**. Read Acts 18.1-2, 18, 26; 1 Corinthians 16.19; 2 Timothy 4.19. The service of this husband and wife can be summarised in three ways: *complementary* (always together, having mutual convictions), *considerate* (their home was always open) and *costly* (they risked their lives for Paul, perhaps at Ephesus in Acts 19). *Their message to us? ‘Christian life sometimes calls on us to make a costly sacrifice for the good of others’. In a word, Be courageous.*
- **Epaenetus** [laudable, worthy of praise], **v.5**. One of four spoken of as ‘beloved’ (also v.8, 9, 12). They are all called ‘my beloved’ except Persis. She is called ‘the beloved’ which is fitting and appropriate language to use for the only woman of the four. *Epaenetus* was especially loved by Paul as the first convert to Christ from Asia (RV, cp. 1 Corinthians 16.15). He was a little foretaste of the abundant harvest that would follow.
- **Mary** [bitter, rebellious, obstinate], **v.6**. Mary was a common name, especially amongst Jews. Even if this woman was once bitter and rebellious in her unconverted days, now saved she ‘laboured much’. The word carries the thought of toil to the point of weariness and exhaustion and is used four times in Romans 16, only of women.
- **Andronicus** [conqueror, victory] and **Junia** [belonging to Juno, youthful], **v.7**. The second name could either be translated Junias (masculine) or Junia (feminine). Only the feminine name has been found in ancient inscriptions (about 250 times). Thus this is likely another husband and wife team. They had been saved for approximately 25 years, having been ‘in Christ’ before Paul. Perhaps they were converted at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2.10). They were Jews (kinsmen) and had been imprisoned for the faith (possibly with Paul). Their great commendation was to be esteemed, or highly regarded by the Jerusalem apostles (the twelve). Some take the word *apostolos* in its secondary meaning of ‘sent one’, in which case they were notable missionaries. *Their message to us? ‘You can have complete confidence in the Christian message. We should know, we were there from the beginning’. In a word, Be confident.*
- **Apelles** [separate, exclude], **v.10**. This brother had been tried and examined, but stood the test. He had passed through the fire of suffering and proved genuine. *His message to us? ‘When the going is rough, hold on, keep going, and win through’. In a word, Be steadfast.*
- **Aristobulus** [best counsellor], **v.10**. Aristobulus was an important name in secular history, being the brother of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12) and grandson of Herod the Great. He was a close friend of Emperor Claudius but died in AD48/49, after which his wife, children, slaves and possessions became the property of the emperor. Thus the group of believers Paul now greets may have been part of the imperial household.
- **Tryphena** [delicate] and **Tryphosa** [dainty, luxurious], **v.12**. Possibly twins, as it was customary to give them names derived from the same root word. *Barclay: ‘You two may be called dainty and delicate; but you belie your names by working like Trojans for the sake of Christ.’* Note. They are greeted alongside Persis, one who once laboured much (past tense). Evidently she was no longer able to labour as these twins, but her service was not forgotten. *Their message to us? ‘Your labour is not in vain in the Lord’. In a word, Be industrious.*
- **Rufus** [red], **v.13**. Possibly the son of Simon the Cyrenian (Mark 15.21). Mark’s gospel was probably written in Rome and Mark may have been personally acquainted with Rufus. He was ‘chosen in the Lord’ which suggests *approval* (not ‘chosen in Christ’ which is associated with *election*). This brother was a choice or extraordinary believer, possibly chosen for a particular task. The once ruthless Saul of Tarsus also salutes the mother of Rufus for the motherly care he had enjoyed at her hand. *Their message to us? The Master Himself said, ‘Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’. In a word, Be caring.*

v.16: In closing the section, Paul commands the saints to greet one another with a ‘holy kiss’ (cf. 1 Corinthians 16.20; 2 Corinthians 13.12; 1 Thessalonians 5.26; 1 Peter 5.14). A kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world generally, and especially in Judaism. Why is this not practised amongst believers today? It was not so much the kiss itself, but the holy token of honour, respect and fellowship that the apostle commands. Thus, what is *cultural* is elevated to a *spiritual* level. The equivalent in our day and culture is a warm, hearty handshake. Note. Head coverings are not *cultural*, but grounded in *creation*. Thus there is no liberty to dispense with such a practice.

A Summons to Separation (16.17-20)

v.17: Suddenly, it seems, Paul moves from *greeting* to *warning*. Perhaps mention of other 'churches' (v.16) with which he has laboured reminded him of the imminent threat of false teachers which he had seen elsewhere. The fact their faithful obedience to the gospel was known to 'all men' (v.19) was the very reason he must warn them. As sure as the Devil sees what pleases the Lord, he will attack it. *Schreiner: Opponents will be anxious to subvert the good that has been accomplished.* Whilst these opponents are not identified, those who plagued Paul more than any other were **Judaisers** (Acts 15.1; Galatians 5.1-4). Paul therefore begs the believers to carefully observe ('mark') and watch for such false teachers. They must be 'avoided' at all costs and certainly not allowed an audience with any of the saints. In terms of their influence, they 'divide' the saints (into Jew and Gentile) and create traps which cause the unwary to stumble and fall. Their teaching is 'contrary' to the divinely revealed apostolic truth the Romans had already received. *Phillips: The way to detect error is to lay the subversive teaching alongside the straightedge of divine truth. Heresy will make little progress in a church that is rooted and grounded in the apostle's doctrine.* **v.18:** Even though they might speak well of Christ, they are far from serving Him. They are motivated by their own selfish interests. Their activity is characterised by deceit, using kind, good-natured and enticing words alongside plausible arguments to pedal their lies. Those who are unsuspecting and naïve (simple-hearted) are easily duped.

v.19: Paul's desire for the saints is that they might be 'wise' in relation to that which is good, i.e. the word of God. Thus we must *know* the truth, and be able to rightly *apply* it to our lives and living. Christians must also retain an innocence (untainted) with respect to what is evil (false teaching and immoral deeds). *JB Phillips: I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil.* **v.20:** Paul closes his warning with a word of encouragement. The source of all evil and error is Satan, and any influence he has through false teachers will be temporary. To establish permanent peace, the God of peace (from *eiro*, to bind together what was divided) will 'shortly' (as far as the divine calendar is concerned) crush Satan and all his activities under the feet of the saints (cp. Genesis 3.15). Believers shall share the glorious victory won by Christ at Calvary. Until the day of final victory comes, there is abundant available 'grace' to meet every assault of the Devil.

Salutations from the Servants (16.21-24)

v.21: Paul returns to salutations, this time from his *company* in Corinth to the saints in Rome. Eight brethren are named, some of which beautifully illustrate the characteristics found in an ideal assembly. *Timothy* [honouring God, valued of God] was a man in whose heart there was a genuine care for the Lord's people (Philippians 2.20). *Lucius* [of the light, luminous] may be Lucius of Cyrene (Acts 13.1), one of the teachers in the church at Antioch. *Jason* [healing, he that cares] is likely the same person that paid bail money for Paul and Silas at Thessalonica (Acts 17.5-9). Here was a man who daily looked for the return of the Lord Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1.10). *Sosipater* [saviour of his father], a variant of *Sopater*, was a man from Berea and thus daily searched the Scriptures to examine what was being taught (Acts 17.11; 20.4). **v.22:** *Tertius* [the third] was Paul's amanuensis. There is some evidence that Paul had poor eyesight, to the point of blindness and thus he found it difficult to write (Galatians 6.11; 2 Thessalonians 3.17). **v.23:** *Gaius* [I am glad] was a man of hospitality and likely Paul's host in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1.14). His home was open, not only to the great apostle, but also to the whole church at Corinth. *Erastus* [beloved] may be the same brother mentioned in Acts 19.22 and 2 Timothy 4.20, but is here noted as the city treasurer, presumably of Corinth. An inscription discovered in Corinth (1929) attributed the laying of a pavement to a man called Erastus, the city *aedile* (responsible for maintenance of public buildings). The final member of Paul's company was *Quartus* [the fourth] described as a 'brother'.

A Song of Salvation (16.25-27)

Paul's final doxology (cf. 1.25; 9.5; 11.33-36) stands as a summary of the epistle and the purpose of God in the present dispensation. **v.25:** Not only is the gospel God's power to *save* (1.16), but also His power to *strengthen* every believer in the truth. With false teachers abroad, Paul is assuring the saints that God will make them firm, strong and stable against any error or trial that may come. The gospel *is* the 'preaching of Jesus Christ' – His blessed Person and work. This gospel is a mystery truth, hidden in the heart of God since time began, but now revealed through the apostle Paul. The particular mystery alluded to is the *salvation* and *joining* together in one body (the church) of both Jew and Gentile on the same ground – faith in a risen and glorified Christ (Ephesians 3.1-7). **v.26:** Now, in this present dispensation, the glorious gospel has been fully revealed through the Person and work of Christ (cf. 3.21) and by the commandment of God. The same is also revealed in the OT scriptures, which are now capable of being fully understood through the lens of NT revelation (1 Peter 1.10-12). As Paul himself declares, the gospel is that which God 'had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures' (1.2). The 'everlasting God' has determined the point in time at which this gospel would be fully revealed. It is now *our* responsibility to make the glorious truth known to 'all nations' that they might believe and obey the gospel. **v.27:** All glory, praise and honour is due to God for His wisdom – the masterplan of salvation worked out in the arena of history through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Amen!