

Romans 16

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Paul sends greetings to 33 people in this “chapter”, 24 were in Rome and 9 were in Corinth. Paul was not only perhaps the greatest theologian of all time, but he also was deeply concerned about people and the relational dependences between them and with him. He was indeed a pastor as well as a teacher.

Rom 16:1 “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

Rom 16:2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

It seems that Phoebe was the carrier of the letter to Rome and Paul asks the Christians in Rome to treat her as a saint and to help her in any way needed. Saying that she is our sister just means that she is another child of God, not a physical descendent. Paul says that she has been a help to many as well as to him. When we think of what she carried in her hands, it is an awesome responsibility. This book sparked the Reformation and unknown numbers (from our perspective) of people were born again by the power of God working through the words in this book. She must have been a very special person to Paul that he could trust her with this treasure. Her name is the feminine form of the name given to the god Apollo, but she obviously became a Christian probably through the teachings of Paul. She is also called a servant and the Greek word used here, diakonos, has caused many people to think that she was a deaconess in the church. Indeed this same Greek word is used in 1Timothy in describing the requirements for a deacon:

1Tim 3:10 “And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

1Tim 3:11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

1Tim 3:12 Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

1Tim 3:13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

However if one reads 1Tim 3:12 even a bit carefully, we see that the Word of God has a problem with a woman being a deacon in the sense of an officer in the church. Note that a deacon must be a husband and a woman cannot be a husband!! So that verse eliminates the possibility of a woman being a deacon officer in the church. However the word means servant and certainly male and female Christians are indeed servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. So treating all of Scripture forbids us from ordaining women as deacons in the church in the sense of being an officer of the church. We certainly are to treat our women Christian servants with the detail administered by Paul in these verses of Romans.

It is unfortunate that some congregations will use Romans 16:1 as their basis for ordaining women as deacon officers in the church.

**Rom 16:3 “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,
Rom 16:4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;
Rom 16:5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.
Rom 16:6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.
Rom 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.
Rom 16:8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.
Rom 16:9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.
Rom 16:10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.
Rom 16:11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.
Rom 16:12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.
Rom 16:13 Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.
Rom 16:14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.
Rom 16:15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.
Rom 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.”**

Twenty four of these people lived in Rome and he did not have email! How did he get to know them? Either he must have met them somewhere else during his trips or he heard about them from other saints. But we see a picture here of a man with a giant intellect who cared deeply about people. We don't know much about many of these people either, but we know that Paul loved them all. Some of them were fellow workers with Paul such as Urbanus and Herodion. Note also that Paul says to greet Rufus and his mother and Paul's mother. Prisca and Aquila worked with Paul and had a church meeting in their home. We don't know when and how they risked their lives for Paul, but they are mentioned six times in the New Testament (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:2, 1 Cor 16:19, and 2 Tim 4:19). Paul says that Andronicus and Junias were his relatives, they had been in prison with him, they were outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before he was. Herodian is stated as also a relative of Paul.

There are certainly many stories here that we cannot know about, but we do see a wonderful picture of the humanity of Paul and that some of his relatives also were born again. It is also remarkable to me that Paul remembers all of these people so well. I am terrible with names, but also I have not been through with other people what Paul went through. It is rather like in the military, I guess, in that you don't forget those who fought beside you and supported you during the warfare. Certainly Paul was involved in fierce spiritual warfare that also became very physical at many times. These people were with

him and helped support him in many ways. What a wonderful life Paul had to know so many people in such intimate ways and to know them all as fellow saints! I am not supposed to envy anyone, but I do envy to some extent that Paul had such wonderful friends. I also thank the Lord that I have not had to endure all that Paul had to endure, but I have a few friends and I cherish them and it would be wonderful to have so many brothers and sisters in Christ that one could count as dear friends.

We exist in the “church militant” age. That does not mean that we are bearing arms but that we are in a spiritual warfare as we studied in our study of Ephesians, especially in chapter six of Ephesians. I have some special friends that stood by me in terrible spiritual warfare and I praise God for them. I remember them very fondly also. Several commentators talk in considerable detail about the people mentioned by Paul above and I refer you to those discussions for more information about all of these wonderful people. In chapter 233 of the Boice reference below you will find more details.

Rom 16:17 “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

Rom 16:18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Rom 16:19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.”

Now Paul suddenly thinks of something regarding life within the church that he must tell them. It is as though the memories of all of these people who were his dear friends in the church suddenly brought to his mind some problem people that he also knew about who could cause a group of believers serious trouble. This segue also reminds me of the first few verses of Psalm 1:

Psalm 1:1 “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:3 And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalm 1:4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.”

We need to be so aware of the Word of God that when someone talks contrary to the Word we are quick to pick up on the deviation. We then need to stay away from these people; no matter how charismatic they might be for Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. Wolves can infest the church body and cause a lot of trouble and Paul certainly encountered these people in his ministry. The motivation of these people is always as Paul says. They are feeding their own appetites as they feed their egos and delight in leading people to themselves and away from Jesus. We have seen many such

people in television ministries during our time, Paul saw many of them in his time, and there will certainly be many more to come for Satan is the great deceiver and these people are not slaves to Jesus but to Satan.

Paul warned of such people in his letter to the Corinthians as noted below (I bolded relevant words).

2Cor 11:3 “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

*2Cor 11:4 For if one comes and preaches **another Jesus** whom we have not preached, or you receive a **different spirit** which you have not received, or a **different gospel** which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.*

*2Cor 11:13 For such men are **false apostles, deceitful workers**, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*

*2Cor 11:14 And no wonder, for even **Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.***

*2Cor 11:15 Therefore it is not surprising if **his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness**; whose end shall be according to their deeds.*

*2Cor 11:26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among **false brethren**;*”

All of the above shows us that the church is indeed infiltrated with Satan and his servants, which includes both demons and human servants. We must indeed be wise and well grounded in the Word of God. It is so important for us as walk in this evil world that we be “**wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.**” We can think of many other Scriptures to go with this one such as Rom 12:2, Eph 4:23-24, and 1 Peter 1:14. We must never separate the spiritual from our activities in the world. We must develop a strong, consistent Christian Worldview so that we constantly apply the Word of God to all that we do 24/7. Our innocence of evil must be as little children with their innocence regarding their knowledge of much of the evil in the world. Of course children are not innocent, but their minds initially are not knowledgeable about much of evil. We adults have had many opportunities to become knowledgeable of evil and the more that we know about such, the more we have to work to get rid of that knowledge and replace it with the good Word of God.

We read in Rev 12:11 that the saint will have victory over Satan:

Rev 12:11 “”And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.”

But also pay attention to the cause of their victory: the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (about Jesus). The true saints love Jesus more than their own life.

Rom 16:20a “And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

There are three surprises in this verse as Boice tells us:

- 1.) That God should crush anyone.
- 2.) That the crushing of Satan should be under our feet.
- 3.) That this crushing is going to happen soon.

If we are a diligent student of the Bible we know that God has crushed people before. We know that Jesus will crush Satan (Genesis 3:15), but how are we involved? Also how do we understand “soon”, for the world is really just as it was as described by Paul in Romans 1: 28-32. Satan argued to Eve that God must not be truly good if He prohibits anything from His created beings (the tree of life). Genesis 3:15 is known as the protoevangelium (the first announcement of the Gospel). Genesis 3:15 and Rom 16:20a are prophecies.

Just as we have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved; Satan has been defeated, is being defeated, and will be defeated.

Regarding the happening of the crushing of Satan to occur soon, the Greek word can be translated to mean either an event that will occur suddenly when it does happen (such as the recent tsunami that occurred quickly with not much warning), or that it will occur soon on a time line. Of course since 2000 years have passed since this writing, the meaning must be that when it does happen it will happen quickly with little or no warning and it will be complete quickly.

- Satan was defeated by Jesus on the cross.
- When a Christian does the right thing when Satan wants him/her to do the wrong thing, there is a sense in which Satan is defeated quickly, so Satan is being defeated everyday by the children of God.
- Then one day Satan will be totally defeated for all time:
Rev 20:10 “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Rom 16:20b “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”

Here we have the third benediction. This one is for the grace of Jesus to be with us. The grace of God is so wonderful. Without His grace we would still be His enemies and without hope. As we know from previous studies, there are two kinds of grace: common grace and saving grace. God’s common grace affects all of mankind and the earth with rain and sunshine and all of His other means of upholding the world in its terrible condition with sin ruling for now. People ask “why do bad things happen to good people” when the correct question is “why do good things happen to bad people”. Without the specific, saving grace of God there are no good people and even with that wonderful grace there are still no people who are always acting like their spiritual condition before God says that they are. It is because God is good that good things still happen to bad people. Jesus addressed this issue as recorded in the writings of Luke:

*Luke 13:1 "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.
Luke 13:2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?
Luke 13:3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.
Luke 13:4 "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?
Luke 13:5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.""*

Jesus is saying that everyone is equally evil unless the grace of God allows them to repent. "Bad" events happen to everyone, and "good" events happen to everyone. But as Christians we can rest on

*Rom 8:28 "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
Rom 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;
Rom 8:30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.
Rom 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"*

Within God's saving grace we have the following:

1. God's Electing Grace

*Eph 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,
Eph 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love
Eph 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,
Eph 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."*

2. God's Redeeming Grace

*Eph 1:7 "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,
Eph 1:8 which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight
Eph 1:9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him
Eph 1:10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him"*

Jesus redeemed us from bondage to Satan so that we are free from that bondage and can now live a life with Jesus as our Master.

3. God's Efficacious Grace

Eph 1:11 "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Eph 1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Eph 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Eph 1:14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

The Holy Spirit now works in the lives of individuals whom God has chosen to bring them to a life of faith.

4. God's Abounding Grace

Rom 5:20 "And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Rom 5:21 that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

5. God's Persevering Grace

Phil 1:6 "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

John 10:28 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.

John 10:29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

6. God's Growth in Grace

2Peter 3:17 "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness,

2Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

1Peter 4:10 "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Eph 4:7 "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

God gives us grace to use the gifts that he has given us for the edification of the church and expects us to use them.

Luke 12:48 “but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”

Now is a good time to think about all that we have been given and to also make a list of what we have given back.

Rom 16:21 “Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

Rom 16:22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

Rom 16:23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.

Now we come to a list of people who were with Paul in Corinth. Paul had been staying at the house of Gaius and he had given Paul a secretary, Tertius, to write letters that Paul dictated. The Roman household had a system of servants whose duties were known by their names, which mean certain numbers indicating their rank within the servants of the household. Tertius is the number three and Quartus is the number four, so these were servants three and four in the household of Gaius. We know that Timothy was a fellow worker of Paul and Paul wrote him letters that we have in the Bible. Paul calls Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater his relatives, which would mean fellow Jews. We cannot be sure of their identification, but Sosipater was probably Sopater of Berea who is mentioned in Acts 20:4. Lucius is not Luke but may be one of the leaders at Antioch mentioned in Acts 13:1. Jason was the name of Paul’s host when he was in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-7). It is likely that these four people had gathered to travel with Paul to Jerusalem.

Rom 16:24 “[The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]”

This sentence is not in the oldest manuscripts and was probably added in the excitement of the copier in his understanding of the above and is a repeat. Indeed I would love to say this sentence twice also for all of the reasons above about the wonderfulness of the grace of God. My prayer also is that this grace will remain with all the readers of this commentary.

Rom 16:25 “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,

Rom 16:26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;”

What does Paul mean when he says “my gospel”? It is plain for all the previous writings that Paul is talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. The context is perfectly clear in that Paul means that the gospel that he preaches is the true gospel of Jesus Christ. As we saw before there were false apostles preaching a false gospel and Paul wants everyone to

understand that he is talking about the real gospel. We need to each also possess this gospel as our own and to have no other gospel.

The Biblical idea of a revealed mystery is something that has been hidden, but now is made known. The particular mystery to which Paul is referring is that salvation is now open to the Jews and the Gentiles through the ministry of the true Messiah, Jesus. Indeed this mystery had been kept secret for a long time and then it was revealed. The mystery was fully revealed upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all of His true followers. Paul stresses, as he always does, that salvation is only by faith and that faith is a gift of God to His chosen people of all nations. The prophets of old had searched the Scriptures:

1 Peter 1:10 "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry,

1 Peter 1:11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

1 Peter 1:12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look."

The Pharisees missed the true Messiah because they were looking for the wrong type of Savior. When Jesus comes again, He will come as they had anticipated Him coming for He will come as a conqueror. But they did not understand the mystery of God's salvation and most of them have still missed the true Messiah. We know the mystery because God gave all His children the indwelling Holy Spirit and because of the writings of the Apostles as led by Him.

The Kingdom of God came when Jesus began His ministry, it is coming during the thousands of years since His ascension, and it will come in its fullest when He comes again to rule for one thousand years (not all scholars agree on this actual thousand year rule) and then totally when Satan is released and then cast forever in the sea of fire. So the Kingdom of God is here now and we are servants in it. We are so blessed to be born on this side of the establishment of the Kingdom of God so we should act accordingly.

Rom 16:27 "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen."

This is the last benediction and a wonderful one. There is only one God and there is only one way to Him and that is through our High Priest, Jesus Christ. To Him we all pray for the glory that only He deserves and that such glory will be manifested forever. And we all say _____.

References

1. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Moody Press, 1975.
2. James Montgomery Boice, "Romans, Volume 4, The New Humanity", Romans 12 - 16, Baker Book House, 2001.
3. John R. W. Stott, "Your Mind Matters", InterVarsity Press, 1972.
4. Harry Blamires, "The Christian Mind", Servant Publications, 1978.
5. R. C. Sproul, "Focus on the Bible, Romans", Christian Focus Publications, 1994.