

Romans 16-1 October 15, 2012

Last time we took most of the lesson to review Paul's last journeys from Corinth, where the letter to the Romans was written, to Jerusalem and then to Rome. This took place over a period of approximately 3 years and we know that because Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem for two years and the difficulty of travel at that time could have taken many months to go from Corinth to Jerusalem. I did this so that you can get a sense of the continuity of the bible. I always think of the book of Acts, written by Luke, as a kind of index or outline of Paul's life and the beginning of the church age. Just as the 2 books of Chronicles are like indexes of the Old Testament.

Rome was the capital of the empire and the center of the world's political, religious, social and economic activity. When Paul preached in the eastern part of the Roman Empire in key cities like, Jerusalem, Antioch in Syria, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, and Ephesus, just imagine all the people he met and evidently many of them ended up in Rome, some were recipients of this letter. He no doubt had many old friends in Rome who he was looking forward to seeing again and he will finish the book of Romans mentioning several of them. Again, Please remember our time context. After Paul left Corinth where he wrote this letter, he journeyed to Jerusalem, walking. Then we found he was under house arrest with Felix for two years.

So it may have been around 3 years between the writing of this letter and his trip to Rome.

This is not just a boring list of 27 names; this is evidence of the friends Paul made along the way of his life who he expected to see in Rome. These verses give us examples of people working together as Paul has been teaching us, people cooperating in the body of Christ to bring the good news to the world and to serve the local church.

As we go through this chapter notice the different relationships and partnerships. I note that Paul calls the individuals named here; sister, brother, servant, saint, patron fellow worker, kinsmen, fellow prisoners, beloved, approved in Christ, elect.

Notice too how Christ is part of most every greeting; welcome her in the LORD, My beloved in the LORD, My fellow worker in Christ. Greet those in the LORD, chosen in the LORD, worked hard in the LORD. Jesus fills all of Paul's conversation.

Lastly notice the love that permeates this chapter. Paul uses the word loved or beloved 4 times. This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "they will know you are My disciples by your love for one another". Isn't it clear from this letter that Paul had a great love, the love of Christ for his friends?

Romans 16:1-2

Phoebe is thought to be the one who carried this letter to Rome, so she is the one person mentioned who is not in Rome, but on her way there. She was a servant or deaconess in the church Cenchrea, located on the Corinthian peninsula, probably a church plant from Corinth. Look what else Paul called her; sister, helper. Do you think it was a small job to carry this letter to Rome? Has God called you to do something you think is insignificant? What if Phoebe had

refused to carry this letter, imagine the consequences of missing this amazing doctrinal statement, one of the greatest in the New Testament in my opinion.

Notice what Paul commands, they are to greet her, accept her, receive her in the LORD in a way that is worthy of the LORD. Do you think Phoebe will be without room and board when she arrives in Rome? No indeed, Paul called Phoebe his sister and I have no doubt she would be a guest in someone's home and be cared for as in the LORD.

Within the body of Christ there is the constant presence of helping one another. What a blessing to be able to serve in helping others and what a blessing to receive that help in a timely manner. Are you available, even for a small job?

Are women part of the ministry of the church, yes, we are, we should be ready to serve wherever God has placed us. Never forget, motherhood is a high and holy calling by God, worthy of all your talent and effort, if God has placed you in a home with little children, what a challenging ministry that is and it is temporary. Mother those babies with all your might as unto the LORD.

Romans 16:3-5

Priscilla and Aquila was a married couple who had become Paul's friends, They and all other Jews, had been expelled from Rome in AD 49 by Emperor Claudius. (Acts 18:2-3) and moved to Corinth. There they met Paul and invited him to live and work with them. At some point, they moved back to Rome, perhaps when Claudius died. They risked their lives for him he says. Notice there was a church meeting in their home.

Romans 15:5b

Epenetus was called a very dear friend than what a special note, he was the first person in Asia to become a believer in Christ.

Romans 16:6

These two were possibly husband and wife and belonged to a special group who had actually seen the risen Christ. If they were in Christ before Paul, then they had been Christians for about 25 years.

Romans 16:8-9

These are common Roman names of this time period

Romans 16:10

Apelles is a Jewish name. Aristobulus may have been related to the Herods. Greeting a household by the way would be greeting the family and the servants.

Romans 16:11

Herodion was a Jew if he was a kinsman of Paul. It sounds like some of the family of Narcissus was not believers.

Romans 16:12-16

Commentaries tell us that these names are from all social and economic levels from slaves to aristocracy. The ground at the foot of the cross is level, is it not?

There the personal greetings end and Paul now is moving on to his final instructions.

Romans 16:17

You recall in the chapters 13-15 Paul has spent a great deal of detail instructing believers in how to live together in unity. Now he goes further to say that they are to avoid people causing dissension in the church. Again why is Paul so adamant about this? Some were making trouble, causing splits between believing groups and they were hindering the free flow of the Gospel. So Paul is warning to beware of these people.

Don't forget Paul loves these Roman believers and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he is warning about the troublemakers causing disunity. Have you ever been part of a church where a group of troublemakers got together and start causing dissension? Friends, I have experienced this and it's terrible, it's like having a family fight. The fall out is devastating from a completely wrecked church to ministries destroyed to people turning from God. You see we have an enemy, who is living and active and wants to see lives destroyed and churches closed. Friends, evil gains momentum, it cannot be allowed to continue.

Romans 16:18

Look at the motives of those causing dissension, they are full of themselves and want to be in power so they lie and mislead and cause weak believers to go astray.

We can be too quick to say we should not judge but friends, we can look at the fruit of the lives of folks who cause division and how does Paul describe them? "Smooth, flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting", they are liars. What did Jesus say about liars? They are of their father, the devil, who is a liar from the beginning. John Lying is from the devil himself.

Romans 16:19

Do you remember at the beginning of this letter Paul wrote "First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. Romans 1:8

Obedience, the very thing for which they are being commended is now considered by many to be old fashioned but how can a child who is undisciplined by his parents learn to obey God?

How much misery is caused by disobedience and seeking one's own way? How many of us have made decisions based entirely on having it our way to our own loss and misery?

If you are going to say 'we are under grace not law'. Grace should not be interpreted as the easy road to having our own way. Even under grace there must be rules for living the Christian life. John said, "His commandments are not burdensome. If we love God we obey Him". Wouldn't it be great to be know for obedience?

Paul closes this thought with the command that we are to renew our minds with God's Word, so that we know all we can about goodness and shut off the TV so we know little about evil.

Romans 16:20

God is the source of our "shalom", our peace and our wholeness and He is going to crush our Adversary

As we hang on to God's written word, we will become wise as to what is good because everything that can be known about what is good is in the bible. When we come to Jesus Christ by faith and we have all knowledge of what is spiritually good.

Of course, the opposite is true. Any spiritual knowledge from any source other than Christ is not true.

Quoting DG Barnhouse: "if we reach out by faith to take all that God has for us in Christ, we shall know the glorious wonder of standing in Christ as He stands with His heel crushing the power of Satan".

Romans 16:21-22

The Roman Empire had a system of numbering slaves and that is how they were named. We have met Primus, number one or boss of the household slaves, similar to a butler and here we have Tertius, third slave.

Romans 16:23

Here is another slave, Quartus-4th slave, who is a brother in Christ.

Romans 16:24

Romans 16:25-27

God is able to strengthen or establish us since the gospel has revealed or opened up the answers of a great mystery to us. What was that great mystery (this refers to something hidden rather than something mysterious). The mystery revealed is that salvation is for Gentiles as well as Jews, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever would believe in Him would be saved. This is the basis of our faith and the foundation of our lives. Friends I know for certain that the command of the eternal God will ultimately bring about obedience to the faith among all the nations of the earth. God's promise to Abraham will be literally fulfilled "In you will all nations of the earth be blessed". Genesis 18:18. This means that through Jesus Christ, the son of David the son of Abraham, God will bring, in deed has brought, blessing to all the nations. Revelations 11:15 "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our LORD and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever". Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God.

Don't let this amazing promise go by without thinking carefully about it, God will establish you. Are you weak in faith? Do you worry about life, the future, your children or grandchildren? Ask the living God to strengthen your faith. Just think, the Creator and King of the Universe is so concerned about you personally that He has promised to establish you, to strengthen you and here is the question, who else can do this? God knows you need it and He is willing and able to do it.

Just a word about this statement in verse 26

That "the mystery or secret of the ages has been revealed by the Scriptures of the Prophets according to the command of the eternal God".

Just think about this for a few minutes; this is saying that men at God's personal direction wrote the Scriptures. We understand from this that those faithful men who wrote did not fully understand what God was giving them but they recorded at His direction the coming of the Messiah, the salvation of the Gentiles and the return of the Jews. Of course since Messiah has come those things are no longer a mystery if you will take the time to read them you will understand that prophecy is history recorded in advance.

In a few months I plan to begin a study of the book of Daniel, which is, in part, the prophecy of the entire Gentile world, most of which has been fulfilled but some is yet to come.

I pray you are convinced now that the whole bible is the word of God and contains His wisdom. No mere man's scoffing can change that truth and we ignore it at our peril.

Romans 16:27

Have you noticed that Paul has given 4 benedictions in this letter through our 16 chapters of study? The first one was Romans 11:36, his benediction on Israel "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever", this is in reference to the certainty of God's promises to the Jewish people.

The second benediction was Romans 15:33 we just saw given as he finished the teachings and began the greetings; "The God of peace be with you all. Amen"

Then after he completed all the greetings from the Corinthian believers to those in Rome he said "The grace of our LORD Jesus Christ be with you all" Romans 16:24.

Now at the end of this magnificent letter, the one that has brought revival to individuals and continents he finished with this last word: Romans 16:26 "to the only wise God through Jesus Christ".

So this letter has been dedicated to God and Paul told us four very important things about our God here. First, He is the only God. Second He is the only wise God. Third He is given glory. Fourth it is through Jesus Christ.

God is absolutely sovereign which I believe is the most important of all doctrines and this certainly agrees with all Paul wrote. Just take note; in the first chapter we find this book of Romans is the Gospel of God. Then the righteousness of God is followed by a discussion of the wrath of God. Following this the righteousness of God is explained and then we learn how this righteousness of God can be communicated to sinners so that they can understand it. Then we see how we can become the people of God and have peace with God. Suddenly we understand that we are so blessed by God that we can say "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The end of the book talks about the people of God and the unchangeableness of God and now we see our obligation, "to God be the glory".

Our God is the only true God, which is why the 10 Commandments begin with "you shall have no other gods before you". How are we to understand this?

Psalm 96:2 "sing to the LORD, bless His name Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. Tell of His glory among the nations. For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised He

is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols (non-existent things). Moses told God's people they had sinned by sacrificing to demons, which were no gods, to gods, they had never known and not for the God who gave them birth. Deuteronomy 32. Another reference which is amazing is in Isaiah 44 where God says "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts; I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. We must understand that all the gods worshiped throughout this world are not gods at all and where there is power and wonders shown, there we find demons at work. Our God is the only God and He has revealed all we need to know about Him in His word the bible.

Not only is He the only God, He is the only wise God. The Bible tells us there are two kinds of wisdom; one can be called natural or worldly wisdom and then there is a supernatural, revealed, wisdom that belongs to God. It is a wisdom that comes from outside our universe. You could say that everything that is wrong in this world is coming out of worldly wisdom. The wisdom of man is from the earth, the fallen soul or from demons. Knowledge and education cannot produce wisdom, we have plenty of evidence of that daily. Adam thought he could trust his own wisdom and God allowed it. Then there was no way out of it because pride holds us all there if we allow it. So all the centuries that have passed with all the suffering and tragedies, should have revealed that man's wisdom is no wisdom. However, in their pride and arrogance, men still believe that education and human wisdom can solve problems, how is that working? American founded by godly men and with a constitution based on biblical principles thrived like no other nation known to men but as we have turned from God, embracing worldly wisdom, and from His word our nation is unraveling with overwhelming economic failure, violence and bloodshed.

Jesus Christ came to earth, the second person of the Trinity, God in flesh, and revealed wisdom and the way man can approach God. He said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes to the Father except through Me". Paul followed up by saying "for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us, who are being saved, it is the power of God. For is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart'.

So it is true the fear or the reverence of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

To God be the glory. Friends, "As many as receive Him He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His Name.

Father let your will be done. Amen