

Paul's Treasury of Friends

Romans 16

Paul concludes his letter to the believers at Rome. Actually, there are four benedictions—Four “Amen’s” (15:1; 16:20, 24, 27). It is similar to when a preacher says in a sermon, “Now in closing...” and goes on preaching for another 15 - 20 minutes and then closes again. Personally, I enjoy “closing” a sermon so much, I may “close” two or three times in one sermon!

Most of Romans 16 is Paul greeting his friends at Rome. The word “greet” occurs five times. “Salute” occurs 17 times.

Paul had many friends. He lists 35 by name in Romans 16 and refers to some not by name (vs. 13, 14, 15). There are those in our churches today would have been miffed if they did not get their name mentioned individually.

Paul did not lump all these into a general group and say, “Greetings to all the saints at Rome.” These were individuals who were dear to Paul’s heart. Love particularizes. As Jesus calls his own sheep by name (John 10:3), so does Paul.

Names are very important. Our own names are music to our ears. Paul knew this. But it is also true that you learn the names of those you really care about. One reason Paul could recite all these names so readily was because he prayed for each of them so often.

➡ What makes this list of those Paul knew in Rome so impressive is the fact that Paul had never been to Rome! Most of the people he mentions are those whom he had met on his journeys and subsequently taken up residence in Rome, or were believers who were with the apostle Paul in Corinth when he wrote this epistle.

- It is noteworthy that among Paul’s list of friends, nine are women (possibly ten).

In a day and age that knew nothing of email, Facebook, or smart phones, the fact Paul was able to stay in touch with the whereabouts of so many of his friends reveals Paul’s great interest in them.

Think of what it took to “stay in touch” with these friends. Imagine Paul on ship and in port beseeching travelers for information: “What about Epaenetus? Is he still growing in faith? How is Urbane doing? s Per-sis still serving the Lord? What can I pray for?”

“*Labour*” is mentioned three times (vs. 6, 12). Some form of the word “help” is mentioned four times (vs. 2, 3, 9). “*Kinsmen*” is mentioned three times (vs. 7, 11, 21). “*Beloved*” (to be loved by) is mentioned four times (vs. 5, 8, 9, 12). To *be loved* by Paul must have a great blessing.

➔ Taken together, **the list represents a cross-section of Roman culture, from slaves to those of high social status.**

I. **Paul’s COMMENDATIONS to those at Rome** (vs. 1-16).

A. INDIVIDUALS

1. Phebe (vs. 1-2). Her name indicates she was a Gentile. She was probably a single lady or maybe a widow.
 - a) She is called a “*sister*” and “*servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.*” Cenchrea is the eastern seaport of Corinth. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans while he was at Corinth, and entrusted Phebe to deliver it to Rome.
 - b) Paul also refers to her as a “*succourer of many.*” She had the gift of “helps.”
 - c) Paul's recommendations were twofold.
 - **Accept** her. “*Receive her in the Lord...*” Paul wanted the saints at Rome to give Phebe a good welcome and reception as believers are supposed to do.
 - **Assist** her. “*Assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you.*” Phebe was not on vacation. She came to Rome on business for the Lord. The saints at Rome were told to help her in her work.
2. Epaenetus (v. 5). A Greek name meaning “praised.” He has the legacy of being Paul’s first convert in Asia. What Christian worker can forget his first convert?
3. Mary (v. 6). Mary is a Jewish name. She “*bestowed much labour on us*” means she labored long and hard.

- There are a half dozen Marys in the New Testament: The mother of the Lord, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, Mary, the wife of Clopas, Mary, the mother of John Mark, and this unknown Mary at Rome.
4. *Amplias* (v. 8). *Amplias* was a common Roman name at this time period, and it often showed up in the imperial household. It is possible that this man was a slave in Caesar's household because the gospel had reached even there (Phil. 4:22).
 5. *Urbane, our helper in Christ* (v. 9). *Urbane* means "city bred" ("city-slicker"). [When *Urbane* got saved, we could say that it was a great case of "Urban renewal."] He was another "helper" of Paul. We cannot do God's work alone. We are to help one another in serving Christ.
 6. *Stachys my beloved* (v. 9). Some people in association with Caesar's household were named *Stachys*. *Stachys* could be either a man or woman. The name does not indicate which gender.
 7. *Apelles approved in Christ* (v. 10).
 - His is either a Greek or a Jewish name — the name was a common one among the Jews. "*Approved in Christ*" is the greatest approval of all—Evidently he stood some outstanding test. Tradition identifies him as bishop either of Smyrna or Heracleia.
 8. *Herodian my kinsman* (v. 11). Another relative of Paul ("my kinsmen.")
 9. *Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord* (v. 12).
 - *Tryphena* ("delicate") and *Tryphosa* ("dainty"). They probably were sisters, maybe even twins because of the close relation of the names.
 10. *The beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord* (v. 12). *Persis* is the name of a freedwoman, and her position may have enabled her to do more than the preceding two sisters.
 11. *Rufus* (v. 13). His name means "red."

- Possibly the same Rufus as mentioned in Mark 15:21. [Mark's Gospel was written primarily for the Romans.] If so, this is a son of Simon of Cyrene, and thus a North African. Rufus's father, Simon, has been identified as the Simeon who was a teacher in the church there (Acts 13:1). Perhaps Paul lived with them, and Rufus's mother had special concern and love for Paul—seeming like a mother to him.

12. *Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them* (v. 14).

- These are all just names to us, but Paul knew them. Probably he had led them to Christ. Perhaps these men were leaders of other house churches. The names are common names, especially among slaves.

13. *Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them* (v. 15).

- Here is another group of believers who were in the church there in Rome.

B. COUPLES.

1. Priscilla and Aquila (vs. 3-5). Some of Paul's greatest helpers. They risked their necks for Paul.

- a) Paul first became acquainted with them in the city of Corinth while Paul was there. Corinth was a commercial center, and since they were all tentmakers, this drew them together (Acts 18:1-3). Paul possibly led them to the Lord.
- b) They were with Paul at Ephesus (Acts 18:19). While at Ephesus they were able to be helpful in grounding Apollos in the faith (Acts 18:24-26).
- c) Priscilla and Aquila had a church meeting in their house (v. 5). The local church met in private homes at the very beginning (Acts 12:12; 1Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 1:2.)
 - The church is a group of people assembled in one place. It could mean either be their household—the saved people in their house—but more likely an assembly that meets there.

- There were no “church buildings” in the first century. Church buildings began about the third century. Many local churches began in houses (Open Door Baptist; Barton Baptist).
2. Andronicus and Junia (v. 7) may have been a husband and wife team (or possibly a brother and sister). Junia (or “Julia”) was a widely used female name at the time.
 - ➡ Four things are said of this couple.
 - a) The **family**. “*My kinsmen.*” These were relatives of Paul.
 - b) Their **fetters**. “*Fellowprisoners.*”
 - c) Their **fame**. “*Who are of note among the apostles.*” This twosome had a good testimony among the apostles.
 - d) They were **first**. “*Who also were in Christ before me.*” They were saved before Paul was saved.¹ They would have been Christians for about 25 years. They probably prayed for their relative Paul to be saved.
- C. HOUSEHOLDS.
1. Aristobulus (v. 10) may have been related to the Herods, perhaps a brother of Herod Agrippa I. He lived in Rome as a private citizen. To greet a household would mean greeting both the family and the servants.
 2. Narcissus’ household (v. 11). To greet those in the household of Narcissus who were “*in the Lord*” may mean that some in Narcissus’s family were not believers.

II. Paul’s CAUTIONS (vs. 17-20).

- ➡ Between two lists of people Paul commends (vs. 1-16; 21-22), he inserts a strong warning against those who would sow sedition in the church.
- A. The DESIGNATING of deceivers (v. 17— “*Mark them...*”).
 1. Deceivers need to be identified.

¹ There are people “*in Christ*” before Acts 9! Proof that “*the body of Christ*” existed before Paul.

➤ The word “mark” comes from the Greek word skopeo. It forms our word “scope.” We must “scope out” deceivers and keep an eye on them (Acts 20:28-30). One of my college professors, Dr. Paul Vanaman, used to say, “Be a devil detector!”

- How to detect error? Compare a teaching against the straightedge of *“the doctrine which ye have learned”* (cf. 6:17; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1-3).
- Heresy will make little progress in a church that is rooted and grounded sound doctrine (Eph. 4:14).

2. Paul was not above calling the names of those who were false teachers (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18).

B. The DANGER of deceivers (v. 17— *“...which cause **divisions and offences contrary** to the doctrine which ye have learned...”*).

1. **Contention**— They cause sedition. God hates the one who *“soweth discord among brethren”* (Prov. 6:19).
2. **Confusion**—They contradict Paul’s doctrinal teaching.

C. The

- b) The Mormons have a “christ” but he was a polygamist and secretly married to the Marys and to Martha at Cana. The Mormon “christ” is a man who later attained “godhood,” and is not the Christ of the Bible.
- c) The Jehovah’s Witnesses have a “christ,” but he is not God manifest in the flesh. The J.W. “christ” is merely a created angel— Michael, the archangel.
- d) The Christian Scientists have a “christ,” but he is not God. He is only a divine ideal.

➡ **The Christ of the Bible is...**

- ...the second Person of the triune Godhead.
- ...was supernaturally conceived of the Holy Ghost and was born of the virgin Mary.
- ...lived an immaculate life... claimed to be God... performed amazing miracles, and proved that claim.
- ...died a vicarious death to atone for the sins of the whole world and gives eternal life to all who trust Him.
- ...rose from the dead physically and literally the third day and ascended bodily into heaven.
- ...is seated today at God's right hand interceding on our behalf.
- ...is coming again to reign over all the earth as King of Kings and Lord of lords! This is "our Lord Jesus Christ."

➡ The “christ” of the cults is the “christ” of 1 John 2:18-22; 4:3; 2 John 7.

2. **Smooth speaking** (“...*by good words and fair speeches*...”). Don’t be fooled by suave, slick talking (cf. Isa. 31:10; Col. 2:4; Jude 16). Paul was NOT known for “*fair speeches*” (see 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6).

The devil is subtle. And when he beguiles people and seduces people, it's never with anything bad! When Judas betrayed Jesus Christ, he did it with a kiss. When the devil came to Eve, the first word he said was, “*Yea...*” (“yes”).

- E. The DEFENSE against deceivers (v. 19).
1. "*Wise unto that which is good*" — Believers are to be wise in their understanding of what is good—in what God wants them to do. This comes from being instructed in the Word of God.
 2. "*Simple concerning evil*" means without a mixture of evil or innocent concerning evil.
 3. Jesus said, "*Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*" (Mt. 10:16). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men*" (1 Cor. 14:20).
- F. The DOOM of the devil (v. 20).
1. The bruising of Satan's head was prophesied in Genesis 3:15.
 2. Satan bruised Christ's heel at Calvary, but the bruising of Satan's head is still in the future—"*The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*"
 3. Psalm 68:18-23; 110:5; Habakkuk 3:11-13 are references to the Lord crushing the head of antichrist at His second coming.
 4. The saints will share with Christ in His final absolute triumph over the Satan. Although your foot may not step directly on the devil's head, when the Lord steps on the devil's head, it'll be under your feet. That is, you'll be over the top of him.

III. Paul's COMPANIONS with him (vs. 21-24).

- A. Verse 21—"*Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.*" Timothy is well known in Scripture (Acts 16:1-3). Paul wrote two letters to Timothy as Timothy worked to strengthen the churches in Ephesus.
- "*Workfellow*" — Timothy wasn't lazy, but worked for the Lord (1 Cor. 16:10).
- B. Verse 22—"*I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.*" Tertius was Paul's secretary. Paul speaks and Tertius writes it down. Same as Jeremiah speaking and Baruch writing it down (Jer. 36:4, 32).

- C. Verse 23—Paul wrote this epistle while he was at Corinth staying in the home of Gaius (v. 23). Gaius was one of the few people Paul actually baptized himself (1 Cor. 1:14 cf. Acts 18:8).
1. "*Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you*" (v. 23). Erastus was the treasurer of Corinth. Corinth was fortunate to have a Christian handling their money. Archeological note: A civic official of this name is mentioned on the inscription on a marble paving-block in Corinth.
 2. "*Quartus a brother*" (v. 23). The name means "one fourth." It was likely a slave name, but respected as a "brother" in the Lord. Though Erastus was a city official, he was no more saved than Quartus.

IV. Paul's **CONCLUDING** remarks (vs. 25-27).

- This is Paul's third P.S. in the letter.
 - Notice three occurrences of "**according to**" — **Believers are established "according to" three things**:
- A. According to Paul's ministry—...**according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ**...
 - Paul's ministry consisted mainly of two things:
 1. Paul's gospel. Gospel = "good news." There are **four gospels** in the New Testament:
 - a) **The gospel of the Kingdom**—God is going to set up a physical, visible, Messianic, kingdom on earth with Jerusalem as its capital as Christ reigns on the throne of David for 1,000 years (Mt. 4:17-23; 9:35; 24:14; Mk. 1:15).
 - b) **The gospel of the grace of God** (Acts 20:24). This is the good news that Christ died for sinners, for sins, and was buried and rose again the third day from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-4).
 - c) **The everlasting gospel** (Rev. 14:6). The everlasting gospel is preached in the great Tribulation by an angel.
 - d) The gospel Paul calls "**my gospel**." (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8). "*My gospel*" is the "good news" that Paul got

specifically by revelation from God (see Gal. 1:11-12). It includes the whole body of revelation given to Paul—The mystery of the church (Eph. 5:30-32)... Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:26-28)... the rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:51-52)... the mystery of a union of both Jews and Gentiles in one body (Eph. 3:1-10).

2. Preaching Christ (Acts 5:42, 8:5, 35; 1 Cor. 1:23; 4:5; Col. 1:28).
- B. According to Paul’s revelation of the mystery—...***according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets...***
- ➡ A mystery is a truth that was hidden in the Old Testament and revealed by God in the New Testament. This specific mystery was the mystery of the Body of Christ composed of both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph. 3:1-10).
- C. According to God’s plan of salvation—...***according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations FOR the obedience of faith:***
- ➡ God has “*made known to all nations*” His commandment for the purpose that people must exercise faith for salvation. “*The obedience of faith*” is another way of saying a person is saved by obeying God’s call to believe on Christ (see Romans 1:5; 10:16; 1 John 3:23).

SUMMATION (v. 27): A doxology and final “Amen.”

1. God’s unparalleled wisdom—*To God ONLY wise...*” (1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25).
2. God’s unending worship—“...*be glory through Jesus Christ for ever.*”
Amen!

Your comments are welcomed. Please [CLICK HERE](#).