

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS

### Lesson 36, Chapter 16 END

The early Church Father Chrysostom of the early 5<sup>th</sup> century said this about Romans chapter 16:

***“I think there are many, even some apparently good commentators, who hurry over this part of the epistle because they think it is superfluous and of little importance. They probably think much the same about the genealogies of the Gospels. Because it is a catalogue of names, they think they can get nothing good out of it. People who mine gold are careful even about the smallest fragments, but these commentators ignore even huge bars of gold!”***

Half or more of Romans chapter 16 seems about as useful as reading a table of contents in a book because indeed it is a list of names to close Paul's letter to the Romans; but there's more in this chapter than only that. For one thing we get a glimpse of the important role that women played in the Messianic movement in Paul's day. Even more we must understand that the majority of these women are Jewish women serving in Jewish synagogues because so-called Christianity was still mostly a sect of Judaism and would remain so until after Paul was martyred. It is fascinating that in an age when male dominance was universal and unquestioned that women played such a prominent role in the movement that Yeshua started. However no doubt this was the case mostly in the Diaspora and not so much in the Holy Land where tradition and the ancient ways were carefully guarded by the Zealots.

Let's read Romans chapter 16.

#### **READ ROMANS CHAPTER 16 all**

We find Paul accomplish a number of things in this final chapter. He introduces Phoebe, a female Believer, to the congregation in Rome. He also asks that the members of the Roman congregation would greet one another with a “holy kiss” (we'll get into the meaning of that shortly). He includes greetings from others of the local congregation (possibly in Corinth) from where he is writing this letter. A strong note of caution is issued for the Roman Believers to beware of false teachers in their midst. He asks the Believers to remember that despite all the difficulties within and without of their congregation final spiritual victory is coming. And lastly Paul prays on behalf of the Romans that Messiah Yeshua would be with them.

Clearly Paul personally knows, or at least knows of, several people in the Roman congregation and has had communication with them. I point this out because since the consensus among Christian commentators has been, for centuries, that this letter to the Romans is actually the formulation of a systematic Christian theology designed by Paul to be followed by all the

churches and in no way was it aimed at the Roman Believers, his acknowledged relationship with some of the Roman Believers explains how it is that he knew what was going on in Rome so that he tailored this letter (as he has all his other letters) to addressing issues that concerned their specific congregation. This letter was by no means an attempt at constructing a universal Christian systematic theology.

Paul begins by introducing Phoebe who, no doubt, is the one who is going to be carrying this letter to the Roman congregation. The CJB calls her a **Shamash** of the congregation (meaning of the local congregation). In Judaism this meant that she held an official office of some sort in her synagogue; she was someone who had duties and authority to carry tasks that could range from caring for the building to serving as President over the synagogue. Christianity has tended to call her a deacon or deaconess, which in Christian cultural terms accurately depicts her position. Paul is asking the Roman congregation to accept her as more or less an agent for Paul. To receive her in the Lord means that she belongs to the body of Messiah and is to be treated in such a manner. This request is much less about making it plain that she is a Believer and much more about her being his female representative. Paul briefly states that her qualifications are that she had been a substantial help to him in his mission of evangelism and has also helped others of the faith.

In verse 3 Paul speaks of some familiar names to us: Priscilla and Aquila. We hear of this influential couple in the Book of Acts, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, and in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy. It has always been a point of focus among Bible scholars how the female's name is mentioned first whenever this couple is spoken of; exactly why is purely speculation but it is unusual. Apparently Priscilla is the more known and active of the two. Her husband Aquila was a Jew who lived in Rome until Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews (or at least most Jews) from the City in 52 A.D. It seems that this married couple who were already Believers moved from Rome to Corinth. There they ran into Paul and found out that they shared the occupation of tent making as well as faith in the Jewish Messiah. Whether Aquila's wife was born a Jew we don't know for certain, but it would have been most unusual for a Jew to marry a gentile woman. So without other evidence there is no reason to think that Priscilla was anything other than a Jew. That we hear of their names so often in the New Testament, and that they are presented so casually, they must have been very well known and prominent members of the Believing community.

It is clear that Priscilla and Aquila had recently moved back to Rome because Paul is not introducing them in his letter; rather he's asking that his greetings be given to them. This helps us a bit in determining the date of this letter since Emperor Claudius who expelled the Jews from Rome in 52 A.D. died in 54 A.D. and the expulsion decree died along with him. So this letter was written sometime shortly after 54 A.D. Paul goes on to explain that Priscilla and Aquila were so devoted to Paul that they risked their own lives to save him from some dangerous situation. There is no record of this in any Bible book or anywhere else; so we don't know what the incident might have been. Notice how Paul mentions to also give greetings to the congregation that meets in Priscilla and Aquila's house in Rome. There were no such things as Church buildings in this era. Depending on the situation the congregations either met in Synagogues or in people's homes. In fact back in our study on the Book of Acts I discussed with you that it is a great misnomer and can be quite confusing for the Bible student to say that by now Believers in Yeshua were called "Christians". Briefly the Greek term **christos** was

translating the Hebrew word *mashiach* (meaning messiah). **Christos** was not a proper name like it has become in English. That is, Christians speak today of Christ almost as though that is Jesus's alternate name. All it meant in Paul's day was messiah. So the word "Christian" (an English word) was not uttered in New Testament times and wouldn't be until much later. Rather the term **christos** would have indicated Messianics (meaning believers in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua; or at least that was the intent of the word).

Further, the Greek word that is invariably translated to "church" in English is also a misnomer and creates confusion. **Ekklesia** is the Greek word found in the New Testament and it is a general word that means gathering or assembly. When the New Testament refers to **ekklesia** most often it means a gathering of Believers; the word "church" didn't exist. Thus there were also no such things as "churches", meaning church buildings. When we can grasp that the terms Christians and Church didn't exist until a very long time after the Bible was closed up, then we can discard the gentiles-only flavor that has been erroneously added to the New Testament. The New Testament was just as Jewish as the Old.

From verses 5 through 15 we get the long list of names that Chrysostom spoke of. We'll not dwell here too long except to say a few words about them. First recognize that all of these names were members of the Roman congregation whom Paul obviously knew. Whether he had personally met them or merely corresponded with them we don't know. Nonetheless to mention them individually meant that he had a friendly relationship with each of them.

The first greeting is to Epaenetus, which is a fairly common Roman name. It seems he held a special place to Paul as he was among the very first successes Paul had and the first name to be mentioned. It is also self-evident that this Believer relocated from Asia to the city of Rome; however nothing is suggested as to the reason for his move. I would suggest that because of the timing, and his being the first to be greeted by Paul, he could very well have been instrumental in establishing the first Believing congregation in the capital of Rome.

Next is a greeting to Mary. This woman could be either Roman or Jewish because the name was used by both, so she could have been either a Jew or a gentile. Apparently Mary was person that Paul heard was a faithful servant to her congregation and worked very diligently at it.

Next are Andronicus and Junia whom Paul describes as his kinsmen. Although the CJB calls them relatives that might be a stretch as the Greek word **suggenes** more usually means fellow countryman (although relative is a legitimate alternate translation). So probably the intent is merely to say that Andronicus and Junia were Jews. Paul says they were in prison with him. We don't know if he means literally that they were imprisoned at the same time as he was or if it means that they too had been imprisoned for some offense that arose from their faith and so they had that in common. We know that Paul had a few stints in jail but these two people were never mentioned in the New Testament in any other letters. It is fairly clear that Andronicus and Junias are a male and female respectively, but we don't know for certain if they were a married couple. They were well known and Paul says that they were Believers before he was.

Ampliatius is called a friend, and no more is said.

Urbanus and Stachys are common Roman slave names. It is known that many freedmen joined the Messianic movement.

Appelles is asked to greet the household of Aristobulus in Paul's name. There is some suggestion that this Aristobulus could well be the grandson of Herod the Great as Josephus tells us that a fellow named Aristobulus was a good friend and confidant of Emperor Claudius and thus lived in Rome. The next verse that adds greetings to Herodion only adds to the possibility that as unlikely as it might seem, some members of the Herod dynasty actually came to belief in Messiah Yeshua. Paul again identifies this person as a kinsman so for sure he was Jewish.

Two women are acclaimed as meriting greetings: Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Some scholars have supposed that because they are named together that they were sisters; perhaps even twins due to the similarity of their names. However that is pure speculation. I just want us to continue to take note of the heavy involvement of women in the movement and how they are given acclamation just as are the men. So very early in the Believing movement the equal worth of women to men was embedded in the faith. That doesn't mean that their cultural roles changed; it is only that women were not shoved to the background or given less value than males. In fact we see that women were in leadership within the movement, even though it was usually leadership over other women.

Another female named Persis is greeted as yet another hard worker for the Roman congregation.

Next Paul says "hello" to Rufus and his mother, whom he says was as a mother to him too. This gives us some insight into an unusually close relationship that Paul had with this family.

In verse 14 Paul continues his greetings to Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympus and others of God's people who are with them. This gives us a strong hint that this is speaking of another and separate Believing congregation. Rome was a large and diverse city; there was room and necessity for a number of Believing congregations.

After the greetings to individuals Paul returns to offering instruction as he says the Roman Believers are to greet one another with a holy kiss. In the Middle East and elsewhere to this day it is customary to be greeted with a kiss, usually on both cheeks. This is not a romantic kiss, but rather it is an indication of brotherhood. Sometimes it is merely a show of respect. A holy kiss was a display of fellowship that was known to have become traditional within the early Messianic community. Perhaps there was a certain protocol and way it occurred that made it recognizably different from the more ordinary and common kiss-greeting of the era. It actually became part of worship services in the early church.

Some Bible commentators have suggested that Paul is warning the Believers in Rome to be sure to greet one another with a "holy" kind of kiss as opposed to a "romantic" kind of kiss due to the number of women who were part of the congregation. This can only be because these commentators aren't aware of the practice of the "holy kiss" as a standard greeting among Believers. That is, a holy kiss became a hallmark of Believers and Paul was urging the

Romans to adopt the practice.

Then in verse 17 Paul continues with something that for some reason he waited until now to address: to watch out for false teachers who cause divisions among the Believers. He goes so far as to say to keep away from them. Paul seeks for Believers to shun other professed Believers who seem to always be causing strife. If you have been a Believer long enough, and attended a congregation long enough, you have met such people. Paul stops short of saying that the trouble makers should be expelled; but he does explicitly instruct to have nothing to do with such members. For the most part Paul equates this strife as being the result of false teaching. He then goes on to explain that these teachers who cause such strife with their false teaching are only in it for themselves. He says they are only there to feed their own bellies (no doubt an expression that means their actions are self-serving).

I prefer to stay away from judging other Bible teachers and pastors because we are called not to judge. And yet we must take that instruction as a generality and not as an absolute since here we have Paul virtually telling the Believers in Rome that they are to shun those who teach falsities and/or teach only for self profit. Thus the biblical order not "to judge" cannot mean to turn our brains off and turn a blind eye to what is obviously insincere, wrong or even criminal behavior. So here I'll take the opportunity to say to you how little regard I personally have for any number of Television Evangelists who certainly seem to be using the Gospel primarily as a means to get rich. When the constant refrain from a pastor or teacher is to send money, or to "plant a seed", or to buy them a jet so they can go to more places faster to spread the Gospel, be skeptical. When every message begins and ends with talking about a book they wrote and want you to buy; be skeptical. I'll not name names but we all know who they are. This doesn't mean that they are not real Believers. But just as with Paul's instruction that doesn't necessarily question a false teacher's salvation, but only his impure motives, so we should do the same. Believers aren't perfect; just saved. Money and fame can be irresistible temptations even for a Believer. Sadly all the through the ages we have names of Christians who have succumbed to the pressures and wound up becoming great swindlers: Jim Baker being one of the most infamous of the modern era. Paul is crystal clear that we are to have nothing to do with Believers like this.

Let me say this another way because it is important that we hear and understand that such unethical and illegal activity among renowned Christians is nothing new. Paul is addressing this issue because he perceives a threat from within the body itself; not from outsiders. He doesn't label any of these false teachers as pretenders. Being on the inside and gaining a relationship and familiarity with the congregation opens the doors wide for the unsuspecting to be fleeced and deceived. I am aware of a situation whereby a bookkeeper for a medium sized church stole well over a million dollars over a period of years. The irregularities in accounting were noticed but since the gentlemen was well known no one felt comfortable enough to confront him so many years passed as the losses kept mounting up. Finally when there was no more denying it and he confessed upon being confronted, the Senior Pastor didn't want to turn him in to law enforcement for embezzlement because he felt that Believers don't judge other Believers. Fortunately lay leaders with a bit more balanced view demanded justice and the person was arrested and sentenced to prison. While the money was never recovered, at least the outflow stopped and the culprit was punished.



Thus it is in the context of looking out for false teachers and for those who only want to serve themselves by using the Lord's name that Paul says Believers are to be wise concerning good and innocent concerning evil. We are to learn and understand what good is in God's eyes so that we can be wise enough to know the difference between good and evil; sometimes the differences can be subtle. Or more often than not, as society evolves the notion of what is good and what is evil evolves and inevitably it evolves away from God's definition. And while we ought not to become explorers and experts in the ways of evil with the notion that by doing so we can learn to recognize and avoid it, we also must not look the other way and make excuses for evil when we see it in ourselves or in our brothers and sisters in the Lord. And again in the context in which Paul has been speaking we must be especially on guard against folks who would cause strife and division within the body. What to do when that happens? Paul says to stay away from them. Give them no influence and no forum to spread their dissention.

The good news says Paul, is that the congregation of Rome is known for being obedient and for this he rejoices. Thus to this point, even though he obviously has heard about the presence of those who are causing strife and promoting false teaching within the Roman congregation, on balance it has remained faithful.

Verse 20 is in some ways odd. In fact many Bible commentators are certain that it doesn't belong here and is out of place; it is not of Paul. However as I have mentioned, there is a thread within Christianity that for various doctrinal reasons does not want Romans chapters 15 and 16 to be seen as authentic or legitimate. C.E.B. Cranfield is not one of these and he says this about this verse: ***".....it is Paul's autograph authentication of his letter. It was customary for the sender of a letter, when the laborious task of actually writing the text had been fulfilled by someone else, to add a concluding greeting in his own hand. This served to authenticate the letter as a signature does today."***

There really is no need to debate it further. Chapters 15 and 16 are legitimate and their contents should be trusted even though certain things said in them shoots holes in the doctrines that some denominations insist upon. Therefore what occurs from verse 21 on is sort of a postscript: a PS. Therefore after Paul has finished saying everything of substance that he wants to impart to the Believers in Rome, he now wants to add that 4 fellows who are with him in Corinth want to get in on the act and say hello to their fellow Believers in Rome. Timothy we know of as Paul's most trusted companion and helper. Lucius we don't know anything about although there is a Lucius mentioned in Acts 13 and perhaps this is the same person. Jason might well be the same Jason mentioned in Acts 17. He was a well regarded Believer who resided in Thessalonica and was described as a close acquaintance of Paul's. Sosipater is spoken of in Acts 20 but it is not possible to determine if this is the same fellow.

Tertius, to whom Paul has been dictating, now adds his own personal greeting. Paul customarily used a scribe to write his letters for him and it was equally customary that the scribe would add his own personal greeting at the end of a letter if it seemed appropriate.

Verse 23 returns to Paul. Here he gives recognition to his host, Gaius, in whose home not only has Paul been residing but it was also where the local congregation met. He offers Gaius's greetings as well. Very probably this is the same Gaius that Paul baptized because Gaius lived

in Corinth.

Erastus is the city treasurer of Corinth. In fact in a wonderful archaeological artifact discovered in the plaza of the theater in Corinth that dates to the same time as Paul's letter, we find an inscription on a plaque that says: "Erastus in return for his aedileship laid the pavement at his own expense." Aedilship refers to what a business manager does. So clearly this Erastus was responsible for the public infrastructure. Quartus is unknown to us.

There is a verse 24 in some Greek manuscripts that most English Bibles omit because it is so certain that it was added by someone long after the letter was completed. It doesn't harm anything but I know of no one who believes it to be original. It reads: ***The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.***

In what can only be described as a doxology (a short hymn of praise to end a service) Paul more or less sums up all that he has taught in his letter. He of course gives all glory to God (for Paul, this means The Father). He speaks of the secret truth (the mystery or ***musterion*** in Greek) that the Lord has revealed through His Son Yeshua; the truth of the Good News. It is a truth that has been hidden in plain sight for ages and ages. It is a truth that was embedded and foretold in the prophetic writings; it is the command of the eternal God and Paul certifies that it has been communicated to the gentiles in order to promote within them a faith in the God of Israel that is based upon trust.

Only God is wise, says Paul; and God's wisdom comes to us through Yeshua the Messiah the Son of God.

I'd like to close today with this thought. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Paul said this:

### **1Corinthians 1:22-25 CJB**

***<sup>22</sup> Precisely because Jews ask for signs and Greeks try to find wisdom,***

***<sup>23</sup> we go on proclaiming a Messiah executed on a stake as a criminal! To Jews this is an obstacle, and to Greeks it is nonsense; <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, this same Messiah is God's power and God's wisdom! <sup>25</sup> For God's "nonsense" is wiser than humanity's "wisdom." And God's "weakness" is stronger than humanity's "strength."***

This completes our study of the Book of Romans.