

[Romans Chapter Sixteen]

~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God leaves the dizzying mountain peaks of God's doctrinal government and comes down to the pavement on the streets of first century pagan Rome in our final report from the epistle to the Romans. This is where we see Christianity walking in shoe leather; and this is Christianity in action. The potent doctrines Paul proclaimed are not missiles aimed at outer space; they are vessels that operate on Roman roads and avenues as the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is translated into the reality of life.

Remarkably, this chapter is largely omitted and ignored by even the very best of outstanding Bible expositors. I have several books on Romans; and all except for one or two of those books devote but a single sentence or two to chapter sixteen. I view this sixteenth chapter as *extremely* important in connection to the overall message of this epistle because we see a mutual love and tender affection which was manifest in the early church....

¹ I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

² That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

~ Phebe carried this epistle to Rome. Can you imagine having had possession of a document like this letter Paul wrote? She was a Gentile and, as we have said, there were many Gentiles in the early Roman church. She was named after the Greek goddess Artemus and Diana – the meaning is the same. In Greek mythology she was the goddess of the moon. Her brother, Apollo, was the god of the sun. Many believers born in Rome were named for Greek mythological characters. Many of those believers relinquished their heathen and pagan name when they turned to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior; and they generally adopted a "Christian" name.

Phebe was, apparently, a prominent woman in the early church. I think this reveals she was a woman of means and high ability. It is likely she was engaged in business, and it appears she went to Rome on business when she took this letter with her. It also reveals that women occupied prominent positions in the early church. She is called a servant – which means deaconess – of the church; and Cenchrea was a seaport town where one would take ship to leave Corinth if you were going east. Of course, it is widely accepted that Paul wrote Romans in Corinth.

Now, I understand many of you dear readers aren't going to agree with me in this statement; but, I want to be right according to the Word of God – not you. So, I believe that if women had been given their rightful place in the church from the beginning, then we wouldn't have all these women becoming preachers and pastors today; and women have absolutely no place in those offices, friends. I *DO* think there should be deaconesses in the church; and that they should sit in equality with any other prominent members. We need the insights and sensibilities women have; but which men just don't seem to have. I feel that God made woman much finer than man. She's much more delicate, too. When a woman walks into a room, the other women will size her up in mannerism in about five seconds. Those on the male end of the spectrum appear quite stupid in that regard, honestly. All we can really determine about her is if she is good looking or not. That's the extent of sound judgment a man has — and it's not a constant! Well, Paul, apparently, trusted Phebe tremendously with this letter....

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

⁴ Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

⁵ Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

⁶ Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.

⁷ Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

⁸ Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord.

⁹ Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

¹⁰ Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.

¹¹ Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.

¹² Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

¹³ Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

¹⁴ Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.

¹⁵ Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.

~ That is quite a list of people Paul prayed for. There were churches that were strictly Gentile at that time. This gives us quite an insight into how the early church in Rome came into existence. Remember, Priscilla and Aquila were Jews who had to leave Rome when another wave of anti-Semitism broke out. I think Priscilla was the spiritual leader in the family. They landed in Corinth where they set up their own business. Corinth was a good commercial center in that day. Of course, they were tent-makers; which is how they met Paul. They were drawn together, and Paul led them both to the Lord. They were also with Paul in Ephesus; but now we find them having returned to Rome. I think the same was true for some of these others Paul sends greetings to.

The local church met in private homes for the first several hundred years of existence. There are many references to that, such as Acts chapter twelve verse twelve, Colossians chapter four verse fifteen – and others. There is no

evidence before the third century of specialized buildings being used for churches. My personal belief is that, because the church began in the home, it will return to the home in time — and will end there. The mausoleums with a steeple thrown on top for good looks are just a pile of brick, stone, mortar and wood, friends. Most do not contain a living body of believers even when they are packed on Sunday morning. The church was never intended to be referred to as a building or as a “place.” The church is the body of believers – even today.

Epaenetus is a Greek name which means “*praise*.” It seems that he was the first convert Paul made in the province of Asia. Mary labored to the point of sheer exhaustion; and Mary is a Jewish name meaning “*rebelliousness!*” A profound change had taken place in this woman’s life! Now she is no longer rebellious but obedient to Christ in serving others.

Andronicus is also Greek and identified with slavery. Junia is a Roman name for either a man or a woman. It could mean they belonged to the tribe of Benjamin because Paul called them his “*fellow countrymen*.” However, there is no particular necessity of a close relationship here. Obviously, Paul had met them in prison somewhere in the Roman Empire. We now know the church in Rome was funded by Paul under some very unusual circumstances. Paul led Priscilla and Aquila to the Lord in the Greek-Corinthian marketplace; these two others were led to the Lord in a jail cell.

Amplias is a common slave name appearing in the tombs of early Christians in the catacombs; and always in a place of honor. This was evidently one of Paul’s converts who was dear to his heart. Urbane means “*city bread*;” and today we would call him a “*city slicker!*” It is just another common slave name meaning he was raised in the city as opposed to out in the country. I feel he was a hard worker amongst the believers. Stachys means “*ear of corn*;” he is found listed in the royal household. Stachys is a masculine name; and he was beloved to the church and to Paul, personally.

Apelles can be either Greek or Jewish and it was common among the Jews. This man had withstood some outstanding tests. Aristobulus is identified as a grandson of Herod the Great. However, it is possible that they were both slaves who simply took the names of their masters. Herodion was,

evidently, a Jew also. The name suggests belonging to the Herod family. Again, it is likely that he simply took the name of the family he belonged to. Narcissus is the name of a well known freedman – not a slave; he was put to death after being made free from slavery.

Tryphena and Tryphosa mean “*delicate*” and “*dainty!*” I feel they were likely elderly ladies who were women of means who came to know Christ. I doubt they could get out for the evening service; but they were still well-loved by the apostle Paul. They supported Paul physically, to be sure. Persis also labored much in the Lord, as we are told. She was a free woman who would have been able to do many things for the work of the Lord. Rufus was related to Paul; and the rest of the list are all just names to us – but – they all came to know Christ! To us, this is just another group of believers in Rome whom Paul knew very well; to Paul, this was his family....

16 Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

19 For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

20 And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

21 Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.

22 I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.

23 Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.

24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

25 Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

~ The "mystery" in verse twenty-five means it was not revealed in the Old Testament. It's not a mystery any longer. Our Spiritual Safari closes commentary in the epistle to the Romans with "obedience of faith!" We moved slowly through Romans, but we only covered a very small portion of the truth found in this epistle. There is so much more to learn when we go back and read it again and again. We are told to trust and obey Christ. When we walk with Him in the light of His Word, what a glorious light He sheds on our paths. When we are in His will, He abides with us still and His sheep hear His voice. Christ knows His sheep and they follow Him. That's the picture, friends; and that's the message....

27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

(Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phebe servant of the church at Cenchrea) ~
