

Romans Study
Session 23 - Romans 15:14-16:27

In the last session, the overt teaching section of the letter to the Roman church which started in 1:18 concluded. Paul's last teaching dealt with the importance of unity within the church body so that God would be glorified by the love, respect and honor the members of the church showed one another, especially where those whose practices on disputable issues differed. Now here at the end of the letter, Paul is going to discuss his past labors, his present program, and his future plans in the ministry. After this he is going to give a shout-out to several people in the Roman church for their faithfulness and end with a doxology.

Paul's past labors

[Read Romans 15:14-21]

What is important to keep in mind that Paul's business that he relates to the Roman church are regarded as important only as they pertain to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is really no mention of any hardships or the mundane labors of life. He is only concerned about talking about himself to the point it glorifies God.

Q: What are the three attributes of the Roman believers that Paul commends in v.14? (*They are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and about to admonish one another. The phrase "full of goodness" speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, a goodness not innate to human beings but only provided by the Spirit upon one's conversion. It is often used to mean moral excellence and means that one has the desire to do the right thing based upon the Holy Spirit's indwelling. The word "admonish" means to bring something to someone's mind that is important. It is a gentle warning or word of caution.*)

Q: What do you think Paul meant when he said that the Roman church was filled with all knowledge? Did they know everything? (*This goes with "admonish". Paul understood that the Romans were more than capable of instructing and discipling one another in their faith in Christ.*)

We often forget that with the Holy Spirit's indwelling we are fully capable of doing anything God calls us to do. We are not only forgiven whole but also competent to carry out the various ministries God calls us to do - especially those relating to building up and teaching one another in the faith. Do not ever let the feelings of inadequacy overwhelm you to the point that you become paralyzed in fulfilling God's calling to you. You have more than enough in the Spirit's presence.

Q: What role did Paul see for himself that he described to the Roman church? (vv.15-16 - He saw himself as a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles ministering as a priest the gospel of God.)

Q: What is the function of a priest? (*A priest is an intermediary between God and man. Paul*

saw himself as an intermediary in the sense of being an ambassador of God's kingdom so that the Gentiles would be sanctified.)

[II Corinthians 5:18-20]

Q: Why do you think Paul will only boast of things pertaining to God? (*v.20 - He does not want to build upon another man's foundational work in the gospel.*)

Q: Why do you think that is an important consideration for Paul? (*v. 21 - This was not so that he could claim credit for the work. It was due to his love for Christ and wanting to reach as many people as possible with the gospel. He didn't want to spend time working in a place that had already been reached with the gospel. They were expected to mature and then spread the gospel around to their sphere of influence, as the Lord directed. He wanted us his life to take the gospel where it hadn't been heard for maximum outreach for the kingdom.*)

Paul gives the scope of his ministry, thus far, for the Romans to understand his life and the extent to where he'd gone to spread the gospel thus far and how it was spread. In v.19 the word "sign" is a fairly common New Testament word that means an indication of divine activity, it is a sign that God did something miraculous and demands to be noted as such. The word "wonders" describes an event which requires explanation to understand. Again, it is used of a miracle God does that makes no sense without understanding that God was behind the event. Both the signs and wonders were done through the Holy Spirit's working through Paul. He does not claim to have any power in and of himself. The only power he has is God working through him.

When describing geography, Paul mentioned that he had been ministering the gospel from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum. Illyricum was in the northwest corner of Macedonia which is the closest Paul had ever been to Rome until he actually made it there. It was a good distance from Jerusalem and actually in Europe.

A note before moving forward. Paul had been desiring to come to Rome for quite some time. Many of his co-workers and associates knew this and he will make it clear in the next passage. Of course, he hadn't made it all the way to Rome yet. Paul brings up the Jerusalem to Illyricum so that they can observe that Paul's delay in coming to visit them was due to his preoccupation with preaching the gospel thoroughly in the east before moving to the western regions of the empire. Now his readers will understand why he didn't come straight from the heavenly city of Jerusalem to the royal city of Rome with the gospel.

Paul's present position and future plans

[Read Romans 15:22-29]

Q: Where is Paul wanting to preach the gospel? (*v.24 - Spain*)

Q: What is he hoping to receive from the Roman church on his way to Spain? (*v.24 - to receive help from them for his journey - prayer, finances, personnel, etc.*)

Q: Before Paul can go to Rome, where does he say he must go first and why? (v.25-6 - *Paul has to go to Jerusalem to give the offering he has been collecting from the Gentile churches to give to the poor and famished Jewish believers in Jerusalem - the mother church.*)

Q: In what ways were the Gentile Christians indebted to the Jewish Christians? (v.27 - *The gospel spread from the Jews first. The early church in Jerusalem is the fountainhead of the gospel and all the Gentile churches owe their salvation and existence to the missionary efforts of the mother church in Jerusalem. Paul's thinking is the same here as it in other letters. If someone shares spiritual truth or guidance with a person or church, that church is indebted to the one sharing the truth to share their material blessings with that person or group.*)

[Read I Corinthians 9:9-14]

After he delivers the gift to the church at Jerusalem, he will be heading to Spain by way of Rome and meet the church then. V.29 means that Paul intended to bring them a spiritual blessing upon his arrival. The blessings of Christ would be poured out upon them and it will be a time of mutual enrichment.

Q: In what ways can we bestow blessings upon those we visit? (*many answers, the issue is whether or not our goal is to be a blessing or spread a blessing to others or not*)

Paul's prayer for the future plans

[Read Romans 15:30-33]

Q: In v.31 what two things does Paul ask the Roman church to be praying for? (*to be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea and that his service in Jerusalem will prove to be acceptable to the saints there.*)

The disobedient Jews in Jerusalem had forced his departure from there at an earlier date (Acts 9:29-30) and there was no reason to think that they had mellowed in their opinion of Paul, whom they saw as a traitor to Judaism for joining the Christians. He doesn't want to be stopped or cast from the city before he can bestow this gift and the blessings of peace upon the church.

The other request was based upon the Pharisaic party within the Jerusalem church. (This is similar to the "weak" believers in Rome.) This group had opposed the fullness of the freedom Christ offers to those who belong to Him and was usually violent when it came to Paul as he preached the freedom from the rituals of the law as part of his gospel message. Despite the ruling of the church council in Acts 15, this party had not fully rested from their opposition and obviously didn't accept the ruling. Thus, Paul was concerned that they might the love-gift of the Gentiles would be spurned by a faction within the church and thus the over all unity of the body of Christ would be torn apart.

The heart of Paul's prayer request is the gospel. They are also integral parts of his plan to come and visit the believers in Rome on his way to Spain. As we know, Paul would indeed make it to Rome but just not as a free man. He ran into some problems in Jerusalem which led him to appeal to Caesar which got him to Rome but in chains as a prisoner of the Emperor.

Chapter 16 is full of personal greetings, a warning against those who would cause fractures to the church and then a closing doxology.

Personal Greetings

[Read Romans 16:1-5]

The first person mentioned by name is Phoebe. She is called a sister (in Christ) from the church at Cenchrea. Cenchrea as a small city located just to the east of Corinth and was the port city for goods and people coming from Asia to Europe through Corinth. It is apparent that she is coming to Rome and they are instructed to help her as she has need.

This recommendation that Paul writes concerning Phoebe is similar to a “church transfer letter”. When a person moves from here to another church somewhere else, the church they end up joining asks me for their “letter”, which means a recommendation that they were members in good standing and actually members of the church where I pastor. This is Paul making sure that the Roman believers, understand that Phoebe is a believer who is also a servant of the Lord and works in a commendable manner and is thus worthy of their fellowship and any assistance she needs.

The next greeting as to Pricilla and her husband Aquila. Their friendship and ministry with Paul went back many years and to many different occasions. If you recall, they had been Christians in Rome but were forced out of Rome by the Edict of Claudius removing all Jews and Christians from Rome. They found refuge in Corinth and while there encountered Paul and showed him great hospitality. (I Corinthians 18:2). They proved to be useful to Paul and so he took them along with him when he left Corinth (I Corinthians 18:18). When Paul left Ephesus for Jerusalem, he left them there to lay the foundation for his return and long ministry there later (Acts 18:24-28). The reference to risking their lives was probably the time when the riot broke out in Ephesus endangering Paul and all his associates. They had a church in their house in Corinth so they probably also had one in Rome when they returned to Rome after the death of Claudius. Their return to Rome was probably encouraged by Paul as to prepare the church for his arrival so that their time together would be maximized. One thing we see is that they are paired together. In them we see the picture of a wonderful Christian marriage. There are several women mentioned in this chapter but this is the only one that we know was married and Luke and Paul always mention them together. A strong marriage is a powerful tool in God’s kingdom and that is why Satan seeks to destroy all marriages.

The last greeting in these first verses is Epaenetus which means praiseworthy. It is understandable that Paul would speak of him as he was the first convert to the faith in Asia. As the first convert, he would hold a special place in Paul’s heart as he was the first to trust the gospel Paul gave his life to proclaim. This gives a clue to Paul’s heart that those he led to the Lord were not just numbers but real people he disciplined and poured his life and love into for the sake of Christ.

[Read Romans 16: 6-16]

Q: Do any of these greetings stick out in your mind?

V.10 - Those of the household of Aristobulus. This one is strange in that Aristobulus was the grandson of Herod the Great who lived in Rome. Though he was not a Christian himself, his slaves had become Christians and were part of the early church.

V. 11 - those of the household of Narcissus. Narcissus was a powerful freeman who was wealthy. As is written historical records of the day, Narcissus' influence with Claudius was unbounded and bore a chief part in the intrigues of his reign. Though Narcissus was certainly no believer, those who served him somehow came to know Christ and became part of the early church.

Q: Where did all these people who are being greeted live? *(in Rome, they were part of the Roman church)*

Q: If you read Paul's other letters, he did not give many greetings, except in the case of the letter to the Colossians. Why do you think that Paul gave so many greetings here in the letter to the Romans? *(He was personally unknown to the Roman church yet he was known to many of the individuals in Rome. Like Pricilla and Aquila, he had met them on his travels and had chances to minister with them in other places before they settled in Rome. Paul, in sending these greetings, is establishing a link to a church who doesn't know them. They do know the people Paul is greeting and so they realize that since these people are people of character and are believers, this Paul can be trusted and respected. If you read Paul's other letters, he does the same in the Colossian letter as they didn't know him either. However, in the churches that did know Paul personally, he refrained from the giving many personal greetings as it would seem he was playing favorites with those he knew.)*

Another aspect of these greetings is history. History gives us a good view of many of these people who have been mentioned here. Paul saw that the Roman church stood to become the strongest church in all the Christendom and those he greeted also, in large part, turned out to be slaves in the Imperial household. We know this from various inscriptions and records that have survived. Thus, many of Paul's friends and co-workers were actually slaves. Yet in that day and time depending upon the service of the slave and the owner, the slaves were actually educated quite well and had outstanding ability - and thus end up in the service of the Emperor. Thus, the fact that many of these in the early Roman church bode well for the later growth of the church. They had connections and the ear of the Emperor in certain matters. The other aspect of this list that is interesting is the mention of several women. One was a wife, one a single woman and another a mother. They were all presented a contributing valuable service to the church and to the kingdom of God. Any who considered Paul a female-bashing misogynist would be proven wrong by this record.

The holy kiss mentioned in v.16 is not erotic but rather a sign of their intimate fellowship in Christ with one another. It was a greeting that indicated the peace and harmony they shared in their common bonds with their Lord Jesus. Paul then takes the liberty to greet the church in Rome by all the churches in the east. He is seeking to promote unity and strong positive relations between the churches.

Warning against those who would cause division in the church

[Read Romans 16:17-20]

It is important to note that Paul is not saying that any in the church at Rome are those seeking to disrupt the unity of the church. He's just spent the last two chapters dealing with the only issue facing the church which was capable of causing such disunity. What he warning against is those who would come to the Roman church from outside and seek to divide it along the lines of what the Judaizers did in the east. Notice he didn't call out anyone by name as he did in other letters. He's just afraid that before he makes it there, certain enemies will come and try to divide or destroy the church before he arrives.

The word "keep your eye on those" means to "watch out!".

Q: What is the basis of the trouble or dissensions these people would bring? (*v.17 - their teachings*)

Q: Who do these teachers serve? (*v.18 - their own appetites*)

Q: What are the Roman believers to do to such teachers? (*v.17 - turn away from them*)

This teaches us the importance of testing those you consider teachers. Don't accept the teaching of anyone but rather test their teaching against Scripture and truth and freedom you have in Christ. If it doesn't match up - turn away from them - get out from under them before the devil's lies impact you and sway you to lose your freedom in Christ.

V.20 - let's us know that the hostility and disunity sought by Satan will be coming to an end as the devil will be crushed under the feet of those who continue to follow Christ. This is a reference to God's promise and the first mention of the gospel in the Bible back in Genesis 3:15 when God promised Adam and Eve after the fall that one would arise from them who would crush Satan. There are two sources of this victory. 1) divine - God's will bruise & 2) human - under your feet. God's power will fill the believer in order to stomp the schemes of Satan. We work with the Lord to bring about this sort of victory - the kind that deals with his schemes through other people against us.

Final greetings and doxology

[Read Romans 16:21-27]

Now that they have greeted everyone in the Roman church, those with Paul want to greet the church at Rome along with Paul.

Q: Who is Tertius and what does it mean in v.22 that he wrote this letter? (Tertius was Paul's secretary who did the actual handwriting of the letter. Paul usually one hand wrote the last paragraph of all his letters. He would dictate the rest of them to a trusted secretary and then finish the writing by his own hand. He actually wrote the letter down but it was at Paul's dictation. This is the only place in any of Paul's letters where the secretary actually makes a personal note to those being written.

Q: By this long list of names in chapter 16, those greeted and those doing the greeting, what are some implications about Paul's ministry? *(1) That he had a lot of help. We often think of Paul being a one-man show but that was rarely the case. He worked with other to accomplish his calling to spread the gospel. 2) His ministry was very fruitful. Other answers possible)*

A benediction pronounces a blessing from God upon another. A doxology ascribes praise to God. These last few verses in Romans are a doxology.

Q: What does Paul mean in v.25 by "my gospel"? *(Paul's gospel was given to him by direct divine revelation. It was not the watered down product of any man's imagination or the result of combining the gospel message with Judaism. As a result, it was different in it's outcome than the other so-called gospels being preached in that day and time.)*

Q: What are some of the other so-called gospels in our society today? *(prosperity gospel, Universalism, fundamentalism, license, etc. many others possible)*

The word "mystery" when used by Paul means the gospel which was not fully revealed in the Old Testament but was only fully revealed through Jesus Christ and His life and ministry. Again, even in the end, you see Paul pick up on the theme of God's universal love for mankind. He is making his gospel known to all nations and leading all to obedience of faith.

The entire doxology could be summed up in that the silence that for so long held the divine mystery has finally given way to unending praise in Jesus Christ.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?