

ROMANS 15-16 – FINAL THOUGHTS, GREETINGS & A WARNING



As we near the end of Romans--Chapter 15, Paul concludes the previous section about being patient with immature Christians who erroneously abstain from things not directly involved with God's laws, such as becoming a vegetarian or choosing particular days to fast. He states, "We then who are strong *ought to bear with the scruples* [doubts] *of the weak, and not to please ourselves*. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ *did not please Himself*; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me" (Rom. 15:1-3).

He points to Christ as the prime example of showing so much love and patience toward others and their foibles. Being God in the flesh, He endured all kinds of insults, fanatical hatred and patiently tolerated the human weaknesses around Him—not only from His enemies, but also from His own disciples. As Peter says: "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten *for your faults*, you take it patiently? But when *you do good and suffer*, if you *take it patiently*, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example*, that you should *follow His steps*" (1 Pet. 2:20-21).

He thus urges them to diligently *study the Scriptures for biblical examples* of spiritual maturity which produces that kind of loving tolerance and strengthens our character. He says, "For whatever things were written before were written *for our learning*, that we through *the patience and comfort* of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Here, the term "patience" is *hupomone* in Greek and means "to prevail in the face of adversity." Applying this virtue will help us look to the future with hope.

He then ends this section with a prayer, "Now may the God of *patience* [Gk. *hupomone* again, that God provides] and comfort grant you to be *like-minded* toward one another, according to *Christ Jesus*, that you may with *one mind* and one mouth *glorify the God and Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore *receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God*" (Rom. 15:5-7). Notice the glory first goes to God the Father and then to Jesus Christ, for as Scripture teaches, God is not a single person but two, although they are one in attitude and mentality (John 1:1-3; 17:21-23).

He explains his authority for writing to them in Rome as he is the apostle to the Gentiles, "Now I say that *Jesus Christ* has become *a servant* [Gk. *diakonos*] to the circumcision for the truth of God, to *confirm the promises* made to the fathers, and *that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy*, as it is written: 'For this reason *I will confess to you among the gentiles*, and sing to your name.' And again He says: 'Rejoice, o Gentiles, with His people!' And again: 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!' And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.' Now may the *God of hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Ro. 15:7-14).

Paul then continues elaborating his reasons for writing to them: "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, *because of the grace given to me by God*, that *I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles*, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so, *I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation*, but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand"" (Rom. 15:15-20).

As *Wiersbe's Commentary* brings out, "God had a special plan for Paul to follow: he was *not* to preach where any other apostle had ministered. (This is one evidence that Peter had not founded the churches at Rome, or had been to Rome; for this would have prevented Paul from going there.)"

He then shares his travel plans, which include going to visit them in Rome and then going to Spain.

He says, "For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, *I shall go by way of you to Spain*. But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:22-28). Spain [*Spania* in Gk.] was in the western end of the Roman Empire where He planned to preach for the first time about Christ.

He then asks them to continue praying for his protection from the persecutions he is experiencing, especially from the Jewish leaders. He asks them: "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that *I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe*, and that *my service* [taking contributions] for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen" (Rom. 15:30-32).

We now come to the last chapter, Romans 16. He first introduces the person who will bring this letter to them—the deaconess Phoebe. He says, "I want this letter to introduce to you Phoebe, our sister, a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea. Please give her a Christian welcome, and any assistance with her work that she may need. She has herself been of great assistance to many, not excluding myself" (Rom. 16:1-2, Phillips version). Phoebe is called a "deaconess" of the church in Cenchrea, one of the ports of Corinth, the city where Paul was staying.

We read of the qualifications of a deaconess in 1 Timothy 3:11, "Deacons' wives must live good lives, so that people respect them. They must not say bad

things against people. They must think carefully about how they live. People should know that they are honest in everything they do" (EASY version). So, Phoebe would soon travel to Rome and deliver this important epistle to them. We thus see how women of faith were trusted coworkers of Paul.

In total, he addresses 26 people at Rome and several house congregations. Some of them he had met elsewhere or knew about them. He closed the epistle with greetings from nine brethren who were with him in Corinth when he wrote this letter. Notice of those 26 people, six are women who assisted Paul in God's work. All of these names are quite common in Roman and Hebrew society and appear in inscriptions or documents from that time.

He then addresses a couple of close coworkers: Priscilla and Aquila. He says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their lives for me. Not only do I give thanks to them, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet the church in their house" (Romans 16:3-5). As Luke writes about Paul in Acts, "And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers" (Acts 18:2-3).

The decree by emperor Claudius against the Jews lasted from A.D. 49-54 and once he died, the Jews, including Priscilla and Aquila, were able to return to their homes in Rome. They then lent their home for Sabbath services. As A. T. Robertson explains, "The early Christians did not have their own meeting buildings, and the Roman Christians probably had several houses where they met."

Paul continues greeting different members of the Rome congregation. He says, "Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits [first one baptized] of Achaia [western Asia Minor] to Christ" (Rom. 16:5). He adds, "Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me" (Rom. 16:5-6). Mary was quite active in the Church, and probably Andronicus and Junia were Paul's blood relatives, as husband and wife. They had been in the

Church for many years before Paul came in and at one time, they had been in prison with him.

After mentioning several others, he adds, "Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus...and Herodion, my countryman" (Rom. 16:10-11). *Believer's Commentary* notes, "Paul greets the household of Aristobulus, probably meaning Christian slaves belonging to this grandson of Herod the Great." Rome had a sizable Jewish population and emperor Nero had one wife, Poppaea Sabina, who was pro-Jewish. This epistle reflects that reality of how Christianity eventually reached even the servants of the upper classes of Jews and Romans.

He then reminds them of the customary greeting when they met in Church: "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). As *Believer's Commentary* points out, "The holy kiss was the common mode of affectionate greeting among the saints then and is still practiced in some countries today. It is designated as *a holy kiss* to guard against impropriety. In our culture, the kiss is generally replaced by the handshake." A holy kiss in the cheek should not have sensual implications, as can happen in Church between the opposite sex. From time to time, there are complaints about this, and we must always be careful, as the Bible says: "Avoid every appearance of evil" (1 Thes. 5:22, TPT).

Now, not everyone was working sincerely with Paul to spread the Gospel. There were some who, for selfish reasons, were teaching false doctrines and gathering a following for themselves (Acts 20:30). So, he has to warn them against those *who sow discord and cause divisions*, saying, "Now I urge you, brethren, *note those who cause divisions and offenses*, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, *and avoid them*. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly [they have *material reasons* to profit for themselves food and comfort], and by smooth words and flattering speech *deceive* the hearts of the simple [or naïve]. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to *be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil*" (Rom. 16:17-19).

The term "divisions" here is *dichostasis* in Greek, which means "to stand apart" or "be separate." It means avoiding them. Paul urges the brethren to "take note" of these people, from the Greek,

skopeite, which means to keep an eye on those to avoid. So, our Church does not attack others as the churches of the world do, which even resort to violence and terrible religious wars to try to stamp out their problems and divisions among themselves (as they still do today). God's Church does not take up arms or become violent, but simply separates the member who causes division, yet without animosity or violence. As Paul says, "*Reject a divisive man* after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11).

To discern the true fruits of people, Paul again recommends developing spiritual maturity. He says, "Therefore, I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to *be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil*" (Rom. 16:19). It's similar to what Christ told His disciples: "Behold, I am sending you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16). That is how the Church should behave until Jesus Christ returns. The Church will not easily expose itself to the world, for it is a small flock and pretty hard to find, so as not to bring more persecution than necessary. This will be the case until, as Paul predicts, "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20). This refers to the first prophecy given in the Bible in Genesis 3:15, which alludes to the return of Jesus Christ, and how Satan will be "crushed." In Rev. 20:1-10, we read of this--how Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss for 1,000 years and of his subsequent fate.

We now see a detail of the authenticity of this epistle, as we have Paul's secretary, Tertius, introducing himself. He says, "I, Tertius, who wrote the epistle, greet you in the Lord" (Rom. 16:22). It was common in those days to use these specialized "scribes" to write these epistles.

Paul concludes by repeating a great truth: "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ" (Romans 16:27). Again, we see that God the Father is distinct from Jesus Christ and comes first in worship. Nor does Paul mention the Holy Spirit as a person or as having to be taken into account when speaking of God's family, which presently consists of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Consequently, what an inspiring epistle we have, where God's loving Plan of Salvation is laid out for us to learn and apply in our lives!