

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 16
Notes from Tuesday May 31, 2011
Last Revised on June 6, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we conclude our study of the **Letter of Paul to the Romans**.

Last week we finished **Chapter 15**.

Tonight we will **easily** finish **Chapter 16**, and have some time left over.

Let me remind you, once again, that our next study, of the New Testament Book of **Revelation**, will begin on **July 5**.

This will give everyone a long **break** during the month of **June**.

Without further ado, as always, let's begin our study this evening with a very quick **review**.

Review

As I have repeatedly said, by way of introduction, the overall **theme** of Paul's letter to the Romans is the **gospel**,

which Paul sets forth in the **first four (4) chapters** of this letter: **everyone** without **exception** is a **sinner**, and the **only** way that anyone **can** be justified is by the **grace** of God through **faith** in Christ.

“Therefore,” Paul writes in the first verse of Chapter 5, ***“since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

This begins the second main section of the letter (Chapters 5 - 8) in which Paul examines some of the **implications** of the gospel, for those of us who are being **saved** by it: we have this marvelous **peace** with God, which far from making it **OK** for us to sin, finally makes it **possible** for us **not** to sin. The Holy Spirit comes to live **in** us, and to lead us away from sin and into right behavior that is pleasing to God.

This second main section of the letter ends (Chapter 8:38-39) with that marvelous passage:

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

It is against this background of great Christian hope and joy and assurance, that Paul launches into the third major section of this letter, consisting of **Chapters 9 through 11**, where Paul examines the **sad** history of the Jews who have **rejected** the gospel.

This is, still for me, a very **difficult** and **mysterious** section of the letter.

It begins on the one hand with Paul’s heart-felt expression of personal grief, for his non-believing Jewish brothers and sisters.

I have in mind Romans 9:1-3 where Paul says, *“I am speaking the truth in Christ---I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit---that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”*

Paul could never have spoken these words unless separation from Christ were **the most serious calamity imaginable**.

Yet by the time Paul reaches the end of this section, he has moved from sorrow and unceasing anguish to hope for the salvation of **many** and praise for God’s great **mercy**.

Let’s read the last seven verses of Chapter 11, where Paul appears to be addressing his remarks primarily to gentile believers:

We read...:

(Romans 11:30-36)

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

We find ourselves coming to this point in the letter (i.e. the end of Chapter 11) wondering (a) what does it mean that *“all of Israel will be saved?”* (b) what does it mean that God has *“mercy on all?”*

 Rather than making this clear, Paul lapses into wonder at God's *inscrutability!*

 At any rate, it is on the basis of these "*mercies of God,*" (as set forth in the first **11** chapters of this letter) that Paul calls for proper Christian **behavior**, in the last major section of this letter, which runs from the beginning of **Chapters 12** through **Verse 13 of Chapter 15**.

 I have begun this review, week after week, by saying that the overall theme of the letter is the **gospel**, and I still think that this is a useful one-word summary.

 However it is also clear from the beginning of the letter, and particularly in reading the concluding parts, as we shall finish doing this evening, that Paul is **not** "**evangelizing**" his readers, or anyone, with this letter.

 Long **before** reading this letter, the Christians in Rome had come to know the gospel and been saved by it.

 Paul's teaching in the first 11 chapters of the letter is a great **help** for Christians of all time, but he did not expect that any of his original readers would find anything that he had to say revolutionary.

 On the **contrary**, he wrote to **remind** them of things they **already** knew, and he generally seemed to assume that they **would** accept the things he had to say without **challenge** or conceptual **difficulty**.

 Q. So what, if not **evangelism** or **catechism**, was Paul's primary **motive**, or what were his primary **motives** in writing to the Romans?

 A. Simply to explain why he had not yet **visited** them, seeing that he planned to do so soon.

 A. To encourage them in meantime in **unity** and proper, loving, Christian lifestyles.

 I begin to think that Paul's main focus is found in the **last**, rather than the first, major section of the letter.

 To summarize that last section: we are to put the interests of **others** before our **own** interests, and sincerely love **everyone**.

 Our best example in this is Christ himself, who came to save the **Jews**, that he might also save the **whole world**, and put **himself** last of all.

 Such is the **character** of our **God** as ultimately revealed in **Christ**.

This is how we, as children of God, are **also** supposed to live: self-sacrificially, in Christ-likeness, expressing sincere love.

The whole **point** of the gospel and all Pauline Theology is to move us to **love**, God and one another,

which we can only do to the extent that we are **filled with** and **yielded to** God, the Holy Spirit.

So **ends** the main **body** of Paul's letter to the Romans,

But the long **conclusion** of the letter,

which runs from **Verse 14** of Chapter 15, to the **end** of chapter **16**,

is also important.

Last week we made it to the end of **Chapter 15**.

Let's **remember** what we read.

Paul begin his conclusion by assuring the Romans that he did **not** doubt their faith by any means,

but had only written to remind them of things which they **already** knew,

because he understood this to be part of his **mission**,

as the **apostle to the gentiles**.

And importantly Paul acknowledges that whatever has been accomplished **through** his Apostolic ministry, had been an accomplishment of **Jesus Christ, through Paul**, and nothing that Paul himself did or ever could have done, or would have done, even if he could!

The **words**, the **deeds**, the **signs**, the **wonders**...let's face it...only **God** can do that stuff.

That this is God's works is also evident from the fact that so many men and women, throughout the gentile lands, **have** come to Christ.

Paul explains that his job has been and, he reckons, still is to go where the gospel has **not** yet been proclaimed,

so he has his sights set on **Spain**,

But **first** he needs to run an errand in Jerusalem, taking to the poor Jewish Christians there the offering of some of the wealthier gentile Christians, and **then** he hope to go to Spain,

and **when** he does, he hopes to stop and visit the folks in Rome,

And in some large measure this letter is intended to **prepare** and **pave the way** for that visit.

Paul does not intend to **evangelize** Rome, or think that he needs to do that.

Nor does he seem to think that they need his **counseling** or **instruction**.

Nevertheless he expect his trip to them to be a **blessing** to them all (i.e. including **himself**).

At the same time, however, he expects his trip **to** Rome to be difficult.

Because he has **enemies, especially in Jerusalem**, where he must visit first.

So he invites the Christians in Rome to **pray**,

with him and **for** him,

for essentially **three** things:

First, that he may be **delivered** from the unbelievers in Judea,

Second, that the **offering** he is bringing to Jerusalem will be **acceptable** to the believers there,

Finally, that Paul may **arrive** in Rome safe and sound.

He ends the prayer by blessing **them**.

The way things turned out, I dare say that God answered all of these prayers **affirmatively**, albeit much **differently** that what most of them had in mind.

We know that Paul finally **did** arrive safely in Rome, but he arrived after much **delay**, as a **prisoner**, having survived a **shipwreck** and many other **difficulties** en route.

From Rome, nevertheless, Paul did continue to **be** blessed and to **be a blessing** to the churches in Rome and throughout the world, and for all time.

God's plan simply **took longer** and was **different** from what most of them could have

anticipated.

From this we can learn several useful lessons on prayer.

This, then, completes my review of the first 15 chapters of Paul's Letter to the Romans.

Do you have any questions or comments before we read on into Chapter 16?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 16, Verses 1-16

Will someone please read Romans 16, Verses 1-16, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

- 1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae,**
- 2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.**
- 3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,**
- 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.**
- 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.**
- 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.**
- 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.**
- 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.**
- 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.**
- 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.**
- 11 Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.**

12 Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.

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

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Thank you.

Verses 1 and 2 read:

(Verses 1 and 2)

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

Most likely this letter was delivered to the church in Rome by Phoebe, who was almost certainly a gentile woman, judging from her name.

It is remarkable that Paul would have sent such an important letter with such a carrier.

Even more remarkable, perhaps, is that he describes her as a “*servant of the church*” using the Greek words which often elsewhere describes men and women who hold the office of deacon.

She is evidently then, an official within the church at Cenchreae, which is the seaport of Corinth,

as well as someone who has given of her personal wealth to sustain the ministries of many others, including Paul himself.

When forming an opinion regarding Paul’s position regarding the roles of women in Christian ministry, it is important not to overlook this Phoebe and the many other women considered by Paul here and elsewhere.

For example we read in Verses 3 through 5

(Verses 3 through 5)

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Prisca and Aquila were a wife and husband team with whom Paul labored long in gospel ministry, as we read in the Book of Acts.

Again it is remarkable that a **woman**, this time probably a Jewish woman, since the Bible elsewhere identifies her husband as being Jewish, is here and elsewhere named **before** her husband.

This probably indicates that Prisca was the **first to accept Christ** and, also perhaps, that her role in Christian ministry was more **prominent** than her husband's.

In describing she and her husband as his "*fellow workers in Christ Jesus*" it seems likely that Paul sees them as fellow **evangelists** and **teachers** who have evidently had an impact on all the gentile churches.

We do know from reading Acts, for example, that Prisca and Aquila, had a hand in **correcting** and guiding the powerful **preaching** ministry of the man Apollos.

Paul indicates here that a group of people gather to **worship** in the home of Prisca and Aquila,

which may make them rather like **pastors**.

Next is mentioned the man **Epaenetus**, who Paul describes as his **beloved** and the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Epaenetus is not mentioned **elsewhere** in the Bible.

His designation as "*beloved*" has no certain significance. Paul tries to have a good word for everyone in this list. Being the **first** to believe in Asia may be reason enough to endear him to Paul.

And Paul uses the **same** term below, in verse 8, to refer to Ampliatus.

Verses 6 and 7 read:

(Verses 6 and 7)

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

The Mary listed in Verse 6 maybe either Jew or Greek.

In either case, this is a women who evidently came to know Paul elsewhere but has in recent years gone to Rome and served there in some capacity, well and with great energy.

Andronicus and Junia were almost certainly a man and a women and probably husband and wife. ---

They are almost certainly not blood relatives of Paul but, rather, fellow countrymen.

There is no record of them having been imprisoned together with Paul,

but whether together or separately, it is likely that the three of them have the common experience of having spent time in prison for proclaiming the gospel.

This would make Andronicus and Junia fellow evangelists and teachers with Paul.

Clearly they were Christians before Paul's conversion and, so, perhaps among those whom Paul himself persecuted and pursued, in the very early days following the death of Stephen.

Most interesting of all is the remark that they are "*well known among the apostles.*"

The ESV translation that this husband and wife are "well known to the apostels" is gramatically possible, but very unlikely. (according to Cranfield)

Almost certainly Paul meant to refer to both of these people as being apostles, which means that here, as in one or two other places, Paul is using the term apostle in its more general sense.

Even so, it is VERY interesting that he uses the term to describe a woman.

What follows in verses 8 through 16 is a continuation of this string of greetings from Paul to Christian believers in Rome, people whom he knows and loves and has worked with before.

Fer of these people can be identified with certainty with people mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. ---

Base only on their names, we can see that they include a mixture of female and male,

gentiles and Jews, some of whom were probably slaves or had once been slaves..

The key points, perhaps, are the **diversity** of the church and that Paul did have some **old friends** among the brothers and sisters in Rome to whom Phoebe could turn for help in delivering this letter, and who would lend credibility to Paul and the things which he has written.

Another key point, it seems to me, is the prominence of **women** in this list.

Finally in verse 16 Paul commends them all to one another and to all the other churches in Christ, which gives us some idea of how well connected Paul was to **many** churches, at least those **outside** Jerusalem.

It is against this backdrop of solidarity and health and peace that Paul issues a brief **warning**.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 16, Verses 17-20

Will someone please read Romans 16, Verses 17-20, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

19 For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Thank you.

There does not seem to be too much of a **doctrinal** problem in Rome.

And Paul does not here seem to be promoting this **own** teaching over that which the Romans had **originally** received from others.

Neither does Paul seem to be **correcting** particular errors that had more recently crept into the church.

Indeed there is every evidence that Paul wrote this letter with some assurance that those who would read it would readily **understand** and **agree** with all that he had to say.

This suggests that the teachings of the primitive church were fairly **consistent** and the Paul's teachings were not so unusual or unrecognizable to others who had not been taught by Paul, and that the body of believers in Rome was **steady** and well able to **teach** and **counsel** one another, as Paul has already said, and as he has made very clear through the list of those to whom he has specifically sent his **greetings**.

Yet **always** and **everywhere**, even in the then **healthy** church of Rome, there is a risk of false teachers slipping in, and Paul urges them simply to be careful,

of those who would try to slip in and **stir up** trouble.

In view of the teachings of Chapters 12-14 (regarding the strong and the weak) I have recently begun to wonder if, in Verse 17 of Chapter 16, it is **division per se**, which Paul views as being contrary the doctrine they have been taught, rather than some **theological** heresy.

Rightly understood, bad **behavior**, divisiveness within the church in particular, **is** heresy!!

And yet Paul does **not** seem to be terribly concerned: they are well known for their **obedience**, and Paul expects for God to crush Satan under their feet....**soon**.

It is not **clear** precisely what Paul means by this. It is **very** unlikely that he has in mind some very near term event in Rome.

Remember he is looking out to his future trips to **Jerusalem**, **Rome**, **Spain**, and **beyond**.

Very likely Paul is here anticipating the **return of Christ** and the **end of the age**, when Satan will be defeated, **finally** be **completely**.

It is hard to know **how** soon Paul expected that this would happen or, indeed, if he had any very definite expectation regarding the timing of the second coming and the end of the age.

He does not, in any case, expect the believers to whom he is writing in Rome to be **defeated** by Satan in the meantime.

Finally, then, Paul closes out the letter.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 16, Verses 21-27

Will someone please read Romans 16, Verses 21-27, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

22 I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

24

25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages

26 but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith---

27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

In **Verses 21-23** Paul mentions some of those who are **with** him and who also **send their greetings**.

Timothy is almost certainly the young man we know so well, who **traveled** with Paul and to whom Paul wrote the **letters** named after him in the New Testament.

We are less certain of the **others** named.

Clearly one of these men, **Gaius**, was Paul's host and one, Tertius, was the **writer** of this letter.

Verse 24 is **omitted** from the ESV and most modern translations.

Verses 25 and 26 are a beautiful final **doxology**, which may or may not have been part of the original letter recorded by **Tertius**

Most likely this was a **later addition**. These verses are in any case a **fitting summary** of this letter.

They call for us to glorify God through Jesus Christ, referring to the gospel of Christ as the

mystery of God which was kept secret for long ages, but which has now been **disclosed** to **all the nations** to bring about the **obedience of faith**.

In one sense, as we have discussed, the *“obedience of faith”* may be thought of as the **“obedience which consists of faith.”**

We are called to believe the gospel, and to believe it is the most important act of obedience and, conversely, to disbelieve the gospel is the most terrible act of disobedience.

But as Paul has shown us, this faith, to the extent it is genuine, has a behavioral out-working

an **obedience** of heart, mind, and body which is born of faith.

This obedience manifests itself as **genuine love, self sacrifice, peace, and unity.**

Perhaps this is as much on Paul’s mind in his Letter to the Romans as anything else.

The **obedience which consists of faith**

is also a **faith which consists of obedience**, to the Spirit of Christ

Love is how faith manifests itself.

Closing Prayer