

Study 18: Romans Chapter 16

Introduction

The list of brethren in the last chapter of Romans is startling. There are about 80 to 100 named people in the New Testament, and 37 of those are mentioned in this chapter – and Paul hasn't been to Rome yet..

Body of the Study

What was Paul's association with the first group?

What do we know about the next group?

The third group

How should we greet one another?

What should we do with divisive brethren?

The fellow workers

The final close

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *If Paul was writing a letter to our local congregation, how would he commend us?*
- *Think about every member in your local congregation, and think what Paul might say about each one of them.*
- *(Optional – write them down, and share with others what you think about them)*
- Read the introduction to Romans in full,
- Read the whole book in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 18: Chapter 16

Introduction

The list of brethren in the last chapter of Romans is startling. There are about 80 to 100 named people in the New Testament (ignoring the Old Testament characters referred to in the genealogies). I'm sure that someone will tell me the exact number sometime. There are 37 of those 80 who are mentioned in this chapter – and Paul hasn't been to Rome yet. Some of them are mentioned only here, and we know nothing else about them.

Body of the Study

What was Paul's association with the first group?

The first group that Paul mentions are Phoebe, and then Aquila and Priscilla. Phoebe is not mentioned elsewhere in scripture, and so we know little apart from what we learn here. She was from Cenchrea, the eastern sea port of Corinth. The occasion of the letter (as we discussed in the introduction study) was probably because Phoebe was about to make the trip to Rome, and Paul used the occasion to write the letter so that she could deliver it.

Phoebe is said to be *a servant* of the church at Cenchrea. The word *diakonon* is used to describe her, but that simply means that she was a servant, and served the church. It is not a necessary conclusion that she was appointed to the office of a deacon, and such should not be read into the passage where the context does not demand it.

She apparently had some personal or official business to undertake in Rome, and Paul urged the brethren to take care of her needs. She had been a helper of many brethren, including Paul.

Priscilla and Aquila were well known fellow workers of Paul. They were Jews who had been forced to leave Rome because of the edict of the Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2). Paul first met them in Corinth, and they later come to Ephesus where he worked with them again. He had a great affinity for these brethren, and shared their common trade of tentmaking. Apparently after having been forced to leave, they had returned back “home” to Rome, when they were allowed to.

Paul describes them as *fellow workers*, and as ones who *risked their own necks for his life*. Their reputation is wide spread, so that not only did he give thanks for them, “...*but also all the churches of the Gentiles...*” (16:4).

Paul sends his greetings to “...*the church that is in their house...*” (16:5). This has some interesting connotations. It could mean that the their house was the regular meeting place of the church in Rome – but given the other similar comments that he makes in the chapter, this is unlikely. It could refer to the brethren who lived in their house (ie the *part of the church* that is in their house). Alternatively, it could be that there were many congregations in the city of Rome. We should note that the letter was not written to a *single congregation* – the church at Rome – but rather “...*to all who are in Rome...*” (1:7). Given the size and population of the city at the time, and their limited communication and transport facilities, the latter seems more probable.

What do we know about the next group?

The next 14 names appear only here in the New Testament, so apart from what is said here, we know nothing.

Epanaetus is described as “...*the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ...*”(16:5). However in 1 Cor 16:15 the household of Stephanas is described in the same way. It could be that Epanaetus had been a member of Stephanas' household and had moved on to Rome. Some translations have in Rom 16:5 “...*firstfruits of Asia...*”, and the difference is textual (ie some texts have “Asia” and some have “Archaia”). Minor discrepancies such as this do not effect outcome of our faith, and are essentially irrelevant except for academic and historical interest.

Epanaetus is described as “...my well beloved...” so Paul must have known him well in Asia. [A discovery has been made in Rome of an inscription bearing the name of Epanetus, an Ephesian]¹ which (if it refers to the same person) might give some insight as to where Paul had known him.

We know nothing more about the particular Mary that is mentioned here, and she is known as *Mary of Rome*. She had spent much labour in the service of the Lord, but we do not know what she did, or in what capacity that she laboured.

Andronicus and Junias are described as Paul’s kinsmen – which suggests that both are males, and Jewish. Paul also describes them as *fellow prisoners*, but we don’t know where or when Paul might have been imprisoned with them. At the time of writing Romans, Paul has yet to be imprisoned in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, and from a reading of Acts the most likely place might be Philippi (Acts 16). However, Paul describes them as being “...in Christ before him...”, and “...of note amongst the apostles...” (16:7), so whilst it might be possible that other prisoners in the Philippian jail were converted apart from the jailer, it is not likely that either Luke would fail to mention it, or that some of those in the prison were Christians.

Amplias, Urbanas, and Stachys are described as *beloved*, or *fellow workers*, are obviously well known to Paul, and he has had a close association with them in the past. Apelles is described as *approved in Christ*. Paul is passing complimentary greetings to those people that he knew well, and we should not assume that one greeting is any greater than the others. He also mentions Aristobulus’ household, which would certainly include his family, and possibly his servants.

Herodian is another of his Jewish kinsmen, and he also greets those of Narcissus’ household who are in the Lord – which implies that perhaps not all of his household are Christians. Paul knows those that are, and sends his greetings.

Tryphena and Tryphosa have laboured in the Lord, and Paul extends an extra greeting to Persis who laboured much in the Lord.

Some writers believe that Rufus might have been the same one who’s father Simon of Cyrene carried the cross for Jesus (Mk 15:21). As evidence for this, is the fact that Mark’s gospel was written primarily for the Romans (and may have been written from Rome) – which would lend some evidence to the reason why Mark may have mentioned Rufus. It could be that Rufus’ family moved to Rome some time after Jesus’ crucifixion. Paul obviously has a warm relationship with the family, and regards Rufus’ mother as if she was *his own mother*. It could be possible of course, that Rufus’ mother was in fact Paul’s mother – and that would make Rufus and Paul either full brothers, half brothers, or perhaps step brothers. If that were the case, and Paul’s family had become Christians, then this is the only place that they are mentioned (except for Paul’s nephew in Acts 23:16). This would seem unlikely, given the family relationships that are mentioned elsewhere in scripture, and so the pseudo relationship is more likely.

The third group

The next 9 names are mentioned only in this place. Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas and Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. The brethren who are with them may include those of close association – or perhaps they all shared a house together. It is also possible that it could refer to another local assembly.

Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas. It seems Paul is having a memory lapse here (I’m being a bit flippant – Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring to the remembrance of the apostles all things that He taught them, Jn 14:26. But by the same token, the name of Nereus’ sister was probably not taught to Paul by Jesus – and is certainly not essential for us to know to have a full and complete relationship with God. So, whilst Paul’s memory on “essential things” was impeccable because it was guided by the Holy Spirit, yet here we see another limitation on the power that the Holy Spirit delivered to those who were inspired). So, Paul just says *his sister*.

¹ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Eerdmans, ISBN 0-8028-3782-4, Vol 2, p 108.

He obviously knew her – but had not learned, or had forgotten her name, or he had learned *about her* but they had not met.

He then adds “...and all the saints who are with them...” which may again indicate yet another local congregation in Rome.

How should we greet one another?

We could take the *holy kiss* salutation literally, and insist that that is the way brethren greet one another. But is that Paul’s intention? Is he specifying the *form* of greeting (kiss), or the manner in which the greeting is delivered (*holy* kiss)?

The custom of the east at the time was for men to kiss men as a greeting, and for women to kiss women. Paul *might* have been instructing the Romans to greet in the same manner – but if that is the case, then the instruction is a little weak (Do I kiss on the left cheek? On the right cheek? On both cheeks? Which one first?). But that is not to say that such instruction is not sufficient, and we are left with liberty as to the form.

Paul is emphasising is that our greeting should be *holy* – set apart – that we are not doing it out of a sense of duty, or in the manner of Judas who *betrayed* the Lord with a kiss, but as a sincere greeting with the purest of motives towards the brethren.

When my Russian friend (and brother in Christ) Yuri first arrived in Australia, after only a few hours he asked “How should I greet people in Australia? Should I shake hands? Or bear hug? Or kiss on the cheek?” Well, I very carefully (and with a straight face) explained that it was our custom to shake hands and poke out our tongue at the same time. It didn’t take very long for him to work out that I was kidding! And as we travelled New Zealand together, we had great fun explaining to those that we met just “how” an Aussie and a Russian first met.

In our modern western culture, we greet by shaking hands. Other cultures have other customs. Paul was simply instructing the brethren on how to apply the custom, and we should do the same in our customary greeting. But if some insist that the only appropriate greeting is a holy *kiss*, then we need to apply the same principles that Paul has given in chapter 14 towards our brethren.

Paul mentions that “...the churches of Christ salute you...” It is not surprising that he would send such a greeting, because the faith of the Romans was wide spread (16:19). But further, there had gathered in Corinth representatives from churches of Asia and Macedonia who were to go to Jerusalem with Paul with the large gift of money (Acts 20:4). So, the greetings may have come from them, and they may have come from the churches that Paul passed through – probably both.

Paul describes these churches as *churches of Christ*. The word church (*ekklesea*) means “a called out body of people”. These called out people belonged to (of) Christ. And so we see the description of God’s people in New Testament times. Now, the question is, if that was what God’s people were called in the first century, then why should they be called anything different today? Why doesn’t every church have a sign out the front that says it is a church that belongs to Christ? [Mind you, having the sign out the front doesn’t make you belong to Christ!] But the question is, *who are we claiming to be?*

What should we do with divisive brethren?

Paul says emphatically (“...I urge you brethren...”) to note those who cause divisions. Noting them (*mark them* KJV) simply means to take note of them. It does not (necessarily) mean that *they have a black mark against them*. In fact in Phil 3:17 the same description is given to brethren in a positive sense. We are to look at the good examples of others *and note them*.

Here, Paul says we need to take note of those brethren who are causing division in the church, and are teaching things that they have not been taught by the apostles (ie it was not the truth). More than just noting them, we need to *avoid them*. He does not say that we should write letters (“poison pen letters”) about them to all of the of the other brethren, but simply to take note of them and avoid them. He doesn’t say that we should seek them out and have fellowship with

them – but take note and avoid them. We should not encourage them, or give them the opportunity to entangle us in their false doctrines.

Those people are not serving God. Their motivation is greed. Their words might seem plausible, and they might have some complimentary things to say about people. But, the end is that they are deceiving the hearts of the naive, who are moved by the form of speech rather than the content.

In contrast to that, the obedience of the Romans has been known to all – everyone has heard of their faith. Paul wants things to remain that way. He wants them not only to be wise, but also to be wise in (knowing and discerning) what is good, and to apply that diligence concerning (avoiding) evil things.

Paul closes this section with the second benediction.

The fellow workers

Paul has passed on his greetings to the brethren, and he now uses the opportunity for those who were with him to also send their personal greetings. Those mentioned are:

- **Timothy** – who Paul chose as his travelling aid, and whom he described as his own son in the faith,
- **Lucius** – If it was Lucius of Cyrene, he was one of the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). It is not Luke the physician, since he did not join with Paul until Philippi (Acts 20:6).
- **Jason** – If it was the same Jason, Paul had stayed with him at Thessalonica (Acts 17:7),
- **Sosipater** – We know nothing else about him.

Paul refers to them as *my kinsmen*, which means they were Jews.

- **Tertius** – was Paul's scribe in writing the epistle. He greets the brethren in the Lord, so he must also have been a disciple,
- **Gaius** – was hosting Paul in Corinth. Paul says that he baptised Gaius (1 Cor 1:14), which lends weight to the letter having been written from Corinth (assuming it was the same Gaius),
- **Erastus** – was the treasurer of the city, and had worked with Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:22),
- **Quartus** – a brother, is only mentioned here.

The third benediction is now brought (16:24)

The final close

In the final section, Paul wraps up (emphasises) some of the points that he has made in the letter:

- We are established according to the gospel – God's eternal purpose was for man to be saved through the gospel,
- We are established in the gospel by God. The gospel did not originate with man. It came from God. Paul said that was the gospel (the good news) that he preached,
- The gospel is about preaching Jesus Christ. Early in the letter he has outlined the state of all of us and concluded all under sin. Jesus Christ is the remedy for sin, and the good news only comes through Him,
- This was a mystery – but the mystery has now been revealed. The mystery was not known (understood) in other times, and was kept a secret since the beginning of the world.
- The Old Testament scriptures have revealed Jesus as the Messiah, and have shown that He was to be made known (made available & revealed) to all nations (not just the Jews).
- It is because of God's commandments (ie the outcome and fulfilment of His eternal purpose) that the gospel has been revealed to everyone (all nations).
- The gospel is given for our obedience to the faith – if we have the same kind of faith that Abraham showed, and we obey God just as he did, then we will receive the reward in exactly the same way that he did – whether we are Jews or Gentiles matters not.
- Thank you Lord.