The Book of Romans

Chapter 16

We are now at the end of this letter Paul wrote to the Christian communities in the City of Rome. This letter, which we have already stated, was a letter of:

1) Unification of two specific groups, the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians who seemed to be at odds over positional points of the faith.

2) Setting foundational doctrine for the two groups to unite under.

3) Establishing behavioral patterns for all Christians to abide by.

4) Sending and receiving greetings of various peoples Paul knows and who are instrumental in the Christian ministries.

We can see that Paul was familiar with certain people who were both in Rome or who traveled to and from Rome on business and faith related functions.

The first person we will meet is Phoebe who is listed in the Greek as deaconess, but in most translations is called 'servant'. Which we will now explain.

A] Romans 16: 1 and 2; (read)

1] "*I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the Church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."*

First, we meet Phoebe, who is carrying this letter to the Roman Christians, but evidently is also going to Rome on business, which tells me that she is a business woman, traveling on a business trip. Now judging by the language used, women were still the subordinate class although we meet many who are the business women and quite independent. And, as I mentioned above, she is called a servant by most translations but the Greek in this case, reads "kai diakonon tes ekklesias" "also deaconess of the gathering" Deacons and deaconesses of the Church did the general serving work among the brethren. She did serve as a deacon, where she was allowed. Frankly many women did then, as they do now, serve in many capacities because as we know today, many men are just "too busy" as they probably were back then.

Paul also tells the folks there to give her every cooperation and help as she also conducts her private business. So Paul has high esteem of her. Did she go alone? I think she went with a group of businessmen and women and general travelers, along with representatives of the Churches in Corinth, whom we will meet in a minute. By the way Crenchae was a suburb and major port of Corinth probably on the eastern side, and she with her fellow travelers went by boat.

B] Romans 16: 3 through 16; (read)

1] "*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the Churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the Church that is in their house."*

What we can best tell, Priscilla and Aquila were from Rome, and under the reign of Emperor Claudius were made to evacuate Rome with other Jews of the day, some say on or about AD 49 which then tells us they were Jewish converts to the Faith in Rome, and became very prominent with Paul on the mission field, as well as facing the same dangers Paul had to face. From historical documents apparently Paul appointed them (or just Aquila) overseers or Bishops over the Asia Minor Churches, and there, they were both martyred probably in the mid to late AD 60's.

2] "*Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ; 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 were in Christ before me."*

Achaia is one of two ancient Greek provinces the other being Macedonia. Corinth is at the southern end of Achaia. So my guess is when Paul made his first missionary foray coming from the western shores of Asia Minor, his first convert was Epaenetus, and he has been with Paul since then. Mary we know nothing about. Andronicus and Junia, these two have a lot of speculation about them, but are probably two people who are Jews who came to Christ before Paul was called. And, who have been with Paul for some time and have faced the hardships Paul has faced. These men were probably known by some of the other Apostles as well. Some speculation has it that possibly Junia is a female name and could she actually be a female Apostle?

3] "*Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord, greet Urbanus , our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord."*

From what I read and study, some of these were Gentile and some were Jewish, all workers in Christ.

4] "*Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord and his mother and mine.*

Tryphena and Tryphosa were Possibly Gentile women who may have been high-born (from a wealthy connected family) who served Paul well. Persis is another woman who labored for Christ, and Rufus was a gentleman who historians say might be the son of Simon the Cyrene (who carried the Cross of Christ). Paul mentions Rufus's mother and she evidently became a mother figure to Paul.

5] "*Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobus, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them."*

These are just more names we could speculate on, and aren’t you glad that you don’t have to pronounce these names on a daily basis? But never-the-less, Paul installs them here. There are a total of twentyeight names listed here along with their families, so were they all along on this trip? Quite possibly these might be some folks who were already there in Rome but will come together in fellowship once those who actually are traveling there, get there.

6] "*Greet one another with a holy kiss, the Churches of Christ greet you."*

One of the customs of peoples of that era was to greet each other with a kiss on either one or both cheeks, as a sign of brotherly affection, much like a friendly handshake today. The 'Holy' kiss would mean a special sign of Christian agape love, one to another. This is how the Christian community ought to greet one another in any case, don't you think? What a show that would make for the rest of the detracting world to observe.

C] Romans 16: 17 through 20; (read)

1] "*Now I urge you brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."*

Paul inserts some words of warning here, after a letter of correction and theological instruction, he makes note that there are those who come among you, and us today as well, who act to deceive and corrupt the Christian Church, and her message.

2] "*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. And the God of Peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The Grace of your Lord Jesus Christ be with you."*

From what I see here, despite their differences that Paul initially addressed, both the Jewish and Gentile Christians were living a peaceful and positive life despite the hardships, and this is what Paul is grateful for. Then he hints at the prospect of the Lord's coming soon.

D] Romans 16: 21 through 27; (read)

1] "*Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen greet you."*

This might be Paul's inner circle, Timothy we know from his many references and even a couple of letters he wrote to Timothy. Lucius could possibly mean Luke the physician who became a constant companion of Paul's from his second journey on and the author of the Book of Luke. Jason and Sosipater we don't know anything about.

2] "*I, Tertius who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord."*

Usually Paul would write his own letters and often he would use an amanuensis or 'secretary' who would write the letters for him as he dictated them. This was apparently who Tertius was and was allowed to say so.

3] "*Gaius, my host and the host of the whole Church greets you. Erastus the treasurer of the city greets you, and Quartus a brother . The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen."*

So we have Gaius who has a home of sufficient size to house the particular Church Paul is staying at in Corinth, and therefore, he might be a man of certain means, but the next name I find interesting, in that this man is the city of Corinth's treasurer. Erastus, was a man of major importance and has become a Christian. We don't know anything about Quartus. And then Paul ends with another benediction. It is almost as if Paul intends on ending the letter and then comes up with an afterthought, and Tertius, not having an eraser good enough to erase ink, just starts another paragraph. (just speculating mind you).

4] "*Now to Him Who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest; and by the prophetic scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith, to God, alone wise be glory through Jesus Christ forever . Amen."*

So when Paul decides to end up the letter, he does so with a flourish. The mystery here is the bringing back the heathen or gentile into the Church with the Jew. As for this 'gospel' all that translates to is 'good news' which is certainly what Paul is bringing them. But what Paul is saying is, this is God's doing, all of it. And to this Paul simply says, To God be the Glory.