

## **A Study in Romans**

### Study Fifteen

#### Romans 16:1-27

##### Day One

16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea.

2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.

4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

5 Greet also the church that meets at their house.

v. 1 – Paul always worked in a ministry team, although it seems that he had to be the team leader for him to be most comfortable. A certain woman named Phoebe was mentioned here for the first and only time. The city of Cenchrea was a seaport town on the Aegean Sea. Since Paul was a “frequent sailor” on his journeys, perhaps he had ministered in Cenchrea at some point. If he did, then maybe this is how he got to know and work with Phoebe.

But my point here is that Phoebe was a woman who had a ministry that Paul was commending to the Roman church. I respect anyone’s position where women in ministry are concerned. It is my position that the Church should promote, develop and allow ministries in and through women according to the will of God. If the Spirit sees fit to distribute spiritual gifts to women, then the Church should recognize those gifts as God’s will.

I believe that the Church has handicapped its ability to carry out its mission because it has severely hindered the effectiveness of at least half its members—the sisters. It was my distinct impression a number of years ago that I was sent with the purpose message that I teach to release not just men, but especially women to clarify and fulfill their purpose.

v. 2 – Phoebe was coming to Rome for some reason. Perhaps she was relocating there and Paul wanted her to be received. Maybe she was traveling in ministry and was going to visit Rome. Either way, Paul wanted her to be received and taken care of. What was the report of her ministry? She had helped many people. I don’t know how well she preached or taught, or how perfect her doctrine was. But she was a servant who had helped a lot of people. That earned her special honor in Paul’s eyes.

I am afraid that today we honor those who are skilled in the pulpit or in other public gifts at the expense of those who serve people. And because we honor these public gifts, more people are encouraged to develop them. Thus we have many who “sweep in” and then “sweep out,” collecting large fees and absorbing the adoration of their “fans.” When this happens, people aren’t helped; they are more often than not entertained.

Make it your goal to serve and help people, even if you have a more public ministry. Find ways to get involved in people's lives in ways that will equip them to be more effective servants themselves. Avoid the temptation to be a "star" and all the trappings that go with it.

v. 3 – We learned in Acts 18:2 that Priscilla and Aquilla were obliged to leave Rome under the edict of the Emperor Claudius. They must have returned when Claudius died. There are seasons in the Lord. What you are doing you may do until the Lord returns or until next week. We must be flexible and not set our expectations that things will always stay the same. They may not.

v. 4 – We are not sure what Paul was referring to at this point. I can only say that being around Paul must have been difficult. People risked their lives for him, Barnabas quarreled and left him, and Paul confronted Peter to his face, as reported in Galatians, because of Peter's hypocritical behavior toward the Gentiles. It must have been hard to be Paul's friend, for I am sure it was "my way or the highway." Yet who else would go into an unreached area, preach openly and leave with a church established? Only a man like Paul could have done that. But he was very human and probably hard to get along with. Do you know anyone like that?

v. 5 – There were no church buildings at this time, so churches met from home to home. While I appreciate the house church movement that has tried to duplicate this phenomenon, I am not sure that house churches can be duplicated in modern culture. I believe in small home cell groups that supplement corporate worship, but I am not particularly in favor of cell groups replacing corporate worship.

If you are involved in something like this and are happy, then stay where you are. This is simply my opinion. I like the corporate gathering where I can see the whole body or at least a good portion of it. I don't like the worship in a small group setting and the presence of children in a small group tends to distract me.

## **Day Two**

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

6 Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

8 Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.

9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

v. 5 – Paul did have some friends, but I would imagine that this man Epenetus was his friend "from a distance"! Paul wrote the Corinthians:

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints (1 Corinthians 16:15).

Perhaps this Epenetus was in the household of Stephanas. But what a distinction to be the first convert and so remembered by the apostle.

v. 6 – Mary left a legacy that she was a hard worker, but with direction. She worked hard for other people. That earned her Paul’s affection and special mention in his letter.

Many people work hard trying to earn the favor of God or men. Some don’t work hard because they feel they should rest in the Lord. I think we are to work hard not to earn favor, but because the cause is a great one—the cause of Christ.

Paul wrote the Corinthians to remind them that their work was not in vain:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The word for labor there is the Greek word *kopos* and it literally means, “intense labor, united with toil and trouble.”

Earlier in that same letter Paul wrote:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The word here for “worked” is a derivative of *kopos*, indicating that what Paul did was wearying. Yet he indicated that it wasn’t him doing the hard labor, it was God’s grace working with and through him. Do you understand what it means to have God’s grace working in and through you? Jesus said:

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

It is in the meekness of Christ that our hard labor becomes easy, for we are trusting and relying on Him to perform the work in and through us. When we function like this, our toil may be burdensome but Jesus carries the real burden. If you have a heavy load right now, then you must ask yourself, “Whose burden am I carrying?” Does it belong to Jesus or have you taken ownership of it?

v. 7 – The word for kinsmen here could simply mean that these two were Jews who were now believers, but we can’t dismiss that they may have been Paul’s relatives. They were in Christ before Paul; it is good to realize that the work of God didn’t begin with you.

When I first came to the Lord, I thought I had invented Christianity. Everyone before me had been in error!

There are some who think that Junias is a women's name. Since Paul refers to these two as apostles, it raises an interesting question of whether women can be apostles? What do you think? What is an apostle? Or was Paul saying that these two were special workers in the eyes of the apostles?

v. 8&9 – Rome had quite a lineup of workers with whom Paul was familiar. This must have been quite a powerful church in the most powerful city in the world at that time.

### **Day Three**

10 Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

11 Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

v. 10 – The words “tested and approved” are metal working terms. They refer to the process of heating a metal so that impurities can be skimmed off the top of the heated metal. When the metal has been so “purified,” it is said to be tested and approved.

This is how God approves His workers as well—in the flames of testing. Fire is a common analogy used in regards to people and the process they must go through for God to use them. Here are a few verses that refer to God's fire:

You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance (Psalm 66:12).

The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire (Isaiah 4:4-5).

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze (Isaiah 43:2).

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11-12).

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Can you find any more? Is there fire in your life right now? See it as God's means to prepare and strengthen you. Don't see the fire as your enemy, but rather as your friend.

vs. 11&12 – It seems that there were quite a few women with whom Paul had worked. He was familiar with how hard these women labored and singled them out for special recognition. As we discussed in verse 6 above, God wants you to work hard for His cause. These women worked hard in the ministry.

Jesus had women who traveled with Him:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3).

Many have focused on what women supposedly cannot do in ministry. I would rather focus on what they can do, and it is probably more than they are allowed to do in some church circles today. Here is what Adam Clarke wrote about this passage:

We learn from this, that Christian women, as well as men, labored in the ministry of the word. In those times of simplicity all persons, whether men or women, who had received the knowledge of the truth, believed it to be their duty to propagate it to the uttermost of their power. Many have spent much useless labor in endeavoring to prove that these women did not preach. That there were some prophetesses, as well as prophets in the Christian church, we learn; and that a woman might pray or prophesy, provided she had her head covered, we know; and that whoever prophesied spoke unto others to edification, exhortation, and comfort, Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 14:3. And that no preacher can do more, every person must acknowledge; because to edify, exhort, and comfort, are the prime ends of the Gospel ministry. If women thus prophesied, then women preached. There is, however, much more than this implied in the Christian ministry, of which men only, and men called of God, are capable (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Biblessoft).

If you are a woman, are you doing all you can do to serve Christ? If not, why not? Are you afraid of offending someone? You should only be concerned about offending God, not others. If you are a man, are you allowing women to find and fulfill their purpose in the church, if that is their sphere of ministry? If not, why not? Are you guilty of preventing the sisters from doing the work that God wants them to do?

v. 13 – Rufus was chosen in the Lord. *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words* implies that this word "chosen" means preeminent, as if some special work or position was bestowed on someone. Whoever Rufus was, God set him apart for distinction. Our

positions “in the Lord” cannot be earned or expected. They are made according to the sovereign choice of God Himself. There is not need for pride or jealousy.

#### **Day Four**

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

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

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

vs. 14&15 – I am impressed with the list of Paul’s acquaintances in Rome. I understand more fully why he chose to write to this church to which he had not yet paid a visit; he knew a lot of people there. Since he met them in other parts of the Empire, perhaps these people were traveling from one place to another for business or ministry. If he could educate these friends concerning the doctrine of faith and the Gentiles, they could help spread the word and teach other cities and churches.

It seems to me that Paul worked smarter, not harder. Do you? Paul commended the hard work of others because he himself worked hard. But he had a strategy—visiting centers of influence in a region, sticking to the main seaports and sea routes for travel, and using the postal service to stay in touch. Paul was an effective worker, something which I am still trying to understand in my own life and work.

v. 16 – A kiss was and is a Middle Eastern custom among close friends. Those in western churches tend to embrace or shake hands. Whatever the custom, the believers are to show visible signs of love and unity among themselves, without concern for what others think. I often embrace brothers in public, only to be greeted with curious stares from onlookers. But they are brothers in the Lord and I am to identify them as such and visibly express my affection and identification with them.

#### **Day Five**

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

19 Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

vs. 17&18 – God does not like anyone who causes divisions.

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked

schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers (Proverbs 6:16-19).

People who cause division aren't serving the Lord, but are following a personal agenda of which they may not even be conscious. But Paul said they are following their own appetite to be correct, dominant, argumentative or rebellious. It is important that you allow God to deal with those hidden parts of your being that may cause you to do things that oppose the truth or righteousness.

A smooth talker is *not* a sign that someone is anointed or godly. It may be a natural gift that if not used properly can influence weak or naïve people. That is why television is such an effective medium for people with the talent of talk, for television promotes image over substance. And that is why we've had so many scandals involving people in that arena. They were great talkers and influenced many to give and follow, but they were for the most part following their own appetites for power and fame.

v. 19 – Paul wanted them to be wise as to good and innocent as to evil. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters. Our brains can only process one thought at a time. Paul urged them to focus on good and not to focus on evil. We should all pursue that which is good and right in God's sight.

### **Day Six**

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

21 Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.

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

23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

v. 20 – The Church will play a part in the final destruction of Satan and his kingdom. First, Jesus promised that believers would help to stamp out the kingdom of darkness:

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you (Luke 10:19).

But then there is an interesting story in the Old Testament. Joshua defeats the armies of five kings, who are trapped in a cave. The story goes:

So they brought the five kings out of the cave—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon. When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, "Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, "Do not be

afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight." Then Joshua struck and killed the kings and hung them on five trees, and they were left hanging on the trees until evening (Joshua 10:23-26).

It was one thing for Israel to defeat these kings, but Joshua wanted them to personally identify with the victory. He wanted them to feel what it was like to put an enemy under their feet. That is the same experience that God wants us to have in our fight against Satan. He wants you to overcome the fear and discouragement by sticking your foot in the neck of the enemy. Can you do that? Are do you want to watch passively from the sidelines of life?

v. 21 – Timothy was with Paul wherever he was. As I have mentioned in past studies, Timothy was unique. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel (Philippians 2:19-22).

How well do you put other's interests ahead of your own?

vs. 22-24 – This chapter began with Paul greeting the saints in Rome by name. Then he sent greetings from his ministry team and mentions eight names. Gaius was noted for his hospitality that was enjoyed by Paul and all the church. Hospitality is a command, but it is also a gift. There are some who are better at being hospitable than others. But we are all to have a spirit and willingness to share our homes and lives:

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9-10).

How hospitable are you? Do you open your home and heart to others? If not, why not?

Erastus was the director of public works, a prominent public figure. There is always something special about a person of prominence who comes to Christ, whether they be a professional athlete, politician or performer. People somehow feel affirmed in their own faith when a person of fame is a Christian as well. It was like that in Paul's day and it is still like that today.

### **Day Seven**

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-

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

v. 25 – Note that Paul referred to “my gospel.” He had insight from God that the good news was to be proclaimed to the Gentiles. That is the “mystery” that was once not clear, but had been made clear through Paul’s ministry. I have taught many times on the topic of purpose and I feel that I could almost refer to that message as “my gospel,” my good news to the world. While others preach purpose, I have not seen anyone approach it the way I do. That is not bragging, for God gave this to me. It has touched many lives and I had no idea what effect the message would have when I first started talking about it.

Has God given you any insight or purpose that is unique to you? I would imagine He has. It is permissible to acknowledge that it is “yours.” Don’t deny what God has done in and for you; rather magnify it—talk to others about it so that they can see it more easily. That’s what magnified means.

v. 26 – God desires that all nations, literally “ethnic groups,” will hear and respond to His invitation for salvation. God will bless those who make God’s agenda their agenda. Remember what Jesus said:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

I have a message I’ve preached entitled, “What Part of Go Don’t You Understand?” What are you doing to spread God’s good news to the nations? Can you go? Can you give? Can you pray? Everyone and every church should work to cooperate with what is called The Great Commission.

v. 27 – Paul referred to God as “all wise.” God’s plan for all mankind is part of His magnificent wisdom. His love is unknowable and His mind is unsearchable. I can never understand God; I can only obey and worship Him.

As you would expect, Paul ended his letter with mention of the name above every other name, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was a servant of Jesus’, of that there is no question.

As we close this study, I hope that you are encouraged in your faith. If you are, what are you prepared to do with that faith? May the Lord continue to give you insight into His word and His purpose for your life and may you have the faith and courage to do what it is He is directing you to do.

Amen and amen!