

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Romans 16:1-27

Key Verse: 16:27

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

As we have studied, Romans contains great doctrinal truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. All men are sinners, with no exception. All men deserve God's wrath and eternal punishment for their sins. However, God, in his great mercy, presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. Those who confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the kingdom of God as their inheritance. Now, we have peace with God; we have joy and the hope of glory. In addition, we are grafted into God's redemptive history by God's grace alone. God has given each of us a priestly duty to bring the gospel to the world. We must live up to this great purpose by preaching the gospel and practicing its teachings in our daily lives.

In retrospect, Paul wrote Romans with sweeping universality. At the same time, Paul wrote with pinpoint precision about the truths of the gospel. Paul's exposition is well-organized, systematic and thorough. Romans has stood the test of time as the best explanation of the gospel. It has made a tremendous impact on human history. It inspired Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Dr. Paul Koh, and others to grasp the gospel truth and God's heart's desire to save men from their sins.

However, Paul was not just a visionary. He was a shepherd who was deeply concerned with people. He did not see people as mere tools with which to fulfill God's plan, but as precious children of God. He saw them with great affection and deep respect. This is revealed in today's passage, Romans chapter 16. Paul greets 29 different persons by name, and various other groups of people as well. As a conclusion to Romans study, let's try to grasp the main point of the whole book and hold one word of God in our hearts. May God bless our study today.

First, Paul commends Phoebe (1-2).

Look at verses 1-2. “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. 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.” Phoebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. She was also called a deaconess, or a servant-leader in the church. This was not limited to cooking and cleaning; it must have included Bible teaching, shepherding and prayer as well. Paul trusted her to deliver this letter. Considering its importance to Paul, we can understand that he really trusted Phoebe. But Phoebe may not have been known to the Roman Christians. So Paul commended Phoebe, that is, Paul endorsed Phoebe. In commending Phoebe, Paul also entrusted her to the Roman Christians for safekeeping. Women like Phoebe are precious in God's work. We must honor and respect them, and make an environment in which they can work.

Second, “greetings” (3-24).

Look at verse 3. It begins with the word “greet.” Paul says, “greet” seventeen times in verses 3-16 to 26 persons and five groups of people. The word “greetings” appears four times in verses 16-24. They are on behalf of Paul's coworkers to the saints in Rome. This letter is full of greetings. What did Paul mean by, “greet,” or “send greetings”?

Verse 16a says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” We should not take this too literally. However, it teaches us that Paul's greeting came from holy affection. Paul said in Philippians 1:8, “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” In greeting God's people, Paul was not just saying, “hello.” Paul was imparting the affection of Christ to his coworkers. Paul's greeting was not physical or emotional in nature, but spiritual. In Galatians 6:18 Paul says, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.” Again, in Philippians 4:23 Paul says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” This greeting uplifted the spirits of the recipients. How we greet others is really important. Failure to greet others properly has caused many unnecessary quarrels. Christians must master how to greet others, especially in the body of Christ. To do so, we must remember the grace of Jesus. We must be filled with the Holy Spirit. May God help us greet our international coworkers with the affection of Christ.

Third, Priscilla and Aquila and the house church (3-5).

Look at verses 3-4. “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.” Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned several times in the Bible (Ac 18:2-3,18-19,26; 1Cor 16:19; 2Ti 4:19). They were Jews from Pontus who immigrated to Rome. They lived in Rome until A.D. 49, when Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. Then they went to Corinth, where they met Paul. Like Paul, they were tentmakers, so they worked together and stayed together. They also became spiritual coworkers in Christ Jesus. They must have accepted Paul’s vision for world salvation based on the word of God. Later, they followed Paul to Ephesus, leaving their business and property behind and starting all over again. Paul says, “They risked their lives for me.” They had a life-giving spirit and a life commitment to the work of God. They were Jews, but they served the Gentiles together with Paul. All the Gentiles were grateful to them.

While in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila heard a scholarly messenger named Apollos preaching the baptism of John. His message was good, but it was always a rebuking message. They realized that he lacked the grace and spirituality of the cross. They did not try to correct him publicly, but invited him to their home and taught him the way of God more adequately. They helped him to know Jesus’ saving grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the practical love of God. They were shepherds and Bible teachers.

Look at verse 5a. “Greet also the church that meets at their house.” Wherever Priscilla and Aquila went, they opened their home to be used as a “house church.” They had a house church in Corinth, in Ephesus, and in Rome. They gathered Christians or truth-seekers, taught the word of God to them, and gave them delicious food. An open door, open arms, and open hearts were the characteristics of their lives. Their house was also a place for prayer for coworkers throughout the nations. Through their house we remember Jesus’ words in Mark 11:17b, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” When we review church history, there is no record of a formal church building until the end of the second century. Rather, house churches, like that of Priscilla and Aquila, were the whole church of God. Notice that Paul did not address them as, “Aquila’s family.” He said, “Priscilla and Aquila” – wife first. In a house church the housewife’s role is very important. Because of this Paul saw them with equal honor and respect.

The words “house church” are familiar to us. Examples of UBF house churches are numerous. Mother Barry’s home is always open. She has lead staff Bible study in her living room for many years. It has become a source of blessing for people around the world. Missionary Grace A. Lee offers her home to serve guests, sometimes for weeks and months. Shepherdess Louise Wicken stayed there nearly one year and received much grace. She was strengthened to serve God as a mother of prayer for England. Pastor Teddy and Liz Hembekides live in the attic of the Triton Bible house and offer the spacious first floor for worship service and Bible study. Their attic room is so small one can hardly sit down. But they stay there to be ready to serve students with Bible study and sandwiches at any time. Many wounded young people were healed through them, and, in turn, established house churches. In this age of the mega-church, we must remember that the house church of Priscilla and Aquila is the Biblical standard. Therefore, mature house church families must go out and pioneer new campuses until each American campus has a house church. Let’s pray for 5,000 house churches in America. Recently we have heard that the face of China is changing through Christian house churches. China will be a Christian nation.

Look at verse 5b. “Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.” In any pioneering work, the first convert is very precious. It requires a special element of faith and courage to be the first believer in a region. This person becomes a sign of God’s work and encourages hope for future ministry. In Sudan, Shepherd Oyer Moses is like Epenetus. In India, Missionary Matthew Singh was like Epenetus among Hindu people. In Kazakhstan, Shepherdess Maria is like Epenetus among Muslims. UBF missionaries worldwide pray for one ancestor of faith. We, too, must pray persistently until God raises one “Epenetus” in each UBF chapter, including St. Louis.

Fourth, the saints in Rome (6-16).

In verses 6-16, Paul greets many Roman Christians by name. Let’s think about some of them. Look at verse 6. “Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.” She reminds us of Missionary Maria Peace in Kiev, Ukraine. She works very hard for God’s people in Ukraine. She is leading Genesis Bible study daily for about 25 people. God has

raised one shepherdess candidate through her. She is working so hard that she lost 35 pounds. Paul thanked God for such women.

Look at verse 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.” Paul was a great apostle who had met the Risen Christ personally. His mission was great. But he did not exalt himself before seniors. He had a deep respect for seniors because they were in Christ before he was. He was genuinely humble.

Look at verse 8. “Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.” In verse 9, Paul calls Stachys “my dear friend.” Paul addresses them with the deep affection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should express our affection of Christ for coworkers like Paul did. Sometimes we are too shy to do so. Paul openly confessed his love to them in a public letter.

Look at verse 10a. “Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ.” There is a saying that one who puts on his armor should not boast like one who is taking it off (1Ki 20:11). A proven warrior who has stood the test in battle deserves recognition as a victor. Likewise, in spiritual battle, one who has overcome persecution and temptation, receiving divine discipline by faith, emerges as a victor. Joseph was tested and approved repeatedly until he became a shepherd to Pharaoh and prime minister of Egypt. Paul recognized Apelles as a great man of God, tested and approved in Christ, like Shepherd Arthur Miranda.

Look at verse 12. “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.” Tryphena and Tryphosa mean “dainty” and “delicate” and allude to luxury. They might have been spoiled princesses among the privileged Roman elite. Perhaps they were like Mary Kate and Ashley. But they were empty and life seemed meaningless. Then they heard the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. They found the meaning of life, the joy of life and their true object of worship. They exchanged worldly glory for eternal glory in the kingdom of God. They worked hard in Christ until they were recognized by Apostle Paul.

Paul also remembered Rufus and his mother. Rufus’ mother was a mother to Paul, too. Paul always seems strong and great in the New Testament. But at one time, he needed a mother’s love. Rufus’ mother loved Paul as her own son. It was a great contribution to Paul’s spiritual growth. Paul did not forget this grace. Like Paul, we must remember Jesus’ grace to us through others.

Fifth, the God of peace will crush Satan (17-24).

In verses 17-19, we learn that there were some among the Christians in Rome who were causing division. Of course, they would not say, “I want to cause division.” But when they lived for their own selfish purpose instead of taking up the cross of mission, they became troublesome in the Christian fellowship. Consciously, or perhaps unconsciously, they caused division in the church. Paul warns the Romans not to be naive about this, but to keep watch for the unity of their fellowship. This is a spiritual battle against the devil who does his best to weaken the Christian fellowship through division. Sometimes there is nothing we can do but watch and pray. But in the end, God gives final victory. Paul had assurance of God’s victory in the Roman church. Let’s read verse 20. “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”

Look at verse 21. “Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.” Paul not only sends his own greetings to Rome, but he also sends greetings on behalf of his coworkers who were with him in Corinth. It is amazing to see Paul’s tremendous respect for Timothy. In fact, Timothy was a spiritual son to Paul. Though he was young and full of weaknesses, he was faithful. So Paul trained him to be a useful shepherd who could inherit a portion of his ministry. Paul did not choose successors from among able men, men of great learning, or successful businessmen. Paul chose faithful men as his successors (2 Tim 2:12). We learn from Paul to find faithful men who can be spiritual coworkers in gospel ministry.

Sixth, to God be the glory (25-27).

Look at verses 25-27. “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, 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—to the only

wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.” This is the conclusion of Romans. As we have studied, Paul wanted to visit Rome and impart a spiritual gift to make them strong. He wanted to have a fruitful harvest there. But it was uncertain that he could go there. Nonetheless, Paul believed that God would establish a world mission headquarters in Rome. They were weak, but the grace of Jesus would prevail.

Paul’s faith was rooted in the absolute sovereignty of God Almighty and his glorious world salvation plan revealed in the Bible. God wants all nations to believe and obey him. This had been hidden in God’s heart from eternity. Yet it was fully revealed through the coming of Christ. Paul caught God’s vision that the kingdom of God would come on earth as it is in heaven. Paul could only praise God as the conclusion of his letter. Through Romans study, let’s pray to have absolute gospel faith. Let’s pray to have God’s vision burning in our hearts. Let’s pray to have the affection of Christ Jesus, and advance God’s kingdom one person at a time. As we do, “to God be the glory.”