

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (25-6-1978 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Romans 16 v 1-16

Introduction

In concluding Romans, Paul sends greetings to a number of people in the church whom he knew. Very interesting list because it tells us a lot about the members' characters and work, and the kind of church it was.

If we went to the church in Rome we would be aware of great differences – clothes, language, they were a lot poorer (mostly slaves), meeting in the room of a church member (probably a large workroom where Priscilla and Aquila made tents). Yet below the surface we would find we had much in common – belief in the same Lord, concern to serve Him, indeed we would have a lot to learn from them.

Letter conveyed through Phoebe “servant” i.e. “deaconess” of the church which was at Cenchrea, part of Corinth. Obviously she was a “trophy of grace” because from heathen and very evil background. The word “deaconess” may mean just a female servant or might be official office. Very likely so in New Testament church c.f.1 Timothy 3:11 (γυναῖκας translated “wives” in A.V. To Rome on business.

Letter of commendation asking church to receive Phoebe and show her hospitality and to help her. Note how she is described in v2 **succourer of many, and of myself also**. Splendid character. Probably Phoebe was in Cenchrea what Lydia was to Paul in Philippi. She had stood by many, and now the Roman Christians are asked to stand by her.

Now to look at church members more closely. Notice how affectionately Paul's greetings are. He remembers each one by name, and details about their lives.

Incidentally a burial place on Appian Way, for ashes of Imperial freed men and slaves, and dating from mid first century contains twelve of these names.

Variety of People in the Church

Church was a motley crowd in which all social distinctions, different social conditions and sexual differences were all swept away.

Names – one is Jewish, five are Latin, one is Persian, and the rest are Greek. So various nationalities with different outlook and speech and habits – all united in the church.

Social background – Priscilla and Aquila (v3). In four of the six mentions of this couple in the New Testament, Priscilla's name comes first. Unless this suggests she was upper in the partnership, this would indicate that she is from important Roman family while her husband is humble Jewish tentmaker.

Tryphena and Tryphosa (v12) were sisters, possibly twins, names meaning “dainty” and “delicate” respectively. Very probably Roman ladies of some social standing.

Yet on the other hand there were many slaves in the church, the household of Aristobulus and the household of Narcissus (v10-11). If Aristobulus was grandson of Herod the Great and friend of Emperor Claudius, and if Narcissus was secretary to Emperor Claudius, these slaves were part of imperial court, and therefore Christians already in highest circles in Empire.

Amazing revolution for rich and poor, master and slave, to sit around same table, and call one another “brother”.

Men and women – especially noteworthy is the place of women. Of 24 names here, at least 6 and possibly the majority are women (cannot be sure in every case which names are male and female). Dignity, honour and respect and importance given to women which never found outside Christian church. In Greek and Roman society, women were men’s baggage and toy. In Jewish Society their lot was better, but they were still inferior.

This has always been an effect of the influence of the Gospel. Gospel always lifts status of women and has hallowing and purifying effect on domestic relationships. Complete equality of status in Christ.

So wonderful unity which can be enjoyed in the Christian church – regardless of race, social position or sex, there is equality, mutual respect and unity. Christian church is place of reconciliation. Every church ought to be a model to a divided world of what Gospel can do to heal divisions which tear society and nations apart. **There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond slave nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus** (Galatians 3:24). That is the doctrine, and in Rome was found the living proof.

Quality of their service

Not many passengers. All in work together, and all with sleeves rolled up. Priscilla and Aquila described as **my helpers in Christ Jesus** (v3). So loyal and devoted that they risked their needs for Paul. Prepared quite literally to put head on the block to save him. **Greet the church that is in their house** (v5). Aquila was tent maker. With Priscilla, he was converted through Paul at Corinth. Wherever they travelled, they always took their faith with them.

They always used their home for the Gospel, as here in Rome. At Ephesus they used home to win Apollos (Acts 18:24f). House church there also in 1 Corinthians 16:19. Earlier at Corinth used home to show Paul hospitality (Acts 18:3). Family of open heart and open door. Home was always centre of Christian fellowship and service. From their home radiated friendship and love. Could people say that about our house? Because Christ is the head, and because of the atmosphere and service there?

Other workers in the church. Mary (v6) who **bestowed much labour** (εκοπιασεν) **on us**. Tryphena and Tryphosa (v12) **who labour** (τας κοπιωσας) **in the Lord**. The beloved Persis (v12) who **laboured much** (εκοπιασεν). (κοπιωω) means work to the point of exhaustion, to work like Trojans, to give to work all that they had, worked to the point of utter weariness. Same word is used in Luke 5:5 **Master we have toiled all the night**. Same word in John 4:6 **Jesus being wearied with his journey sat on the well**.

Salute Rufus and his mother and mine (v13). Rufus's father Simon had carried cross for Jesus in Mark 15:21. His mother had been very kind in some way to Paul. Andronicus and Junia (v7) (husband and wife?) were **my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles** (here used in broad sense of one sent to tell story of Jesus). Urbane (v9) **our helper in Christ**. Apelles (v10) **approved in Christ**. Also Paul's well beloved Epaenetus (v5), Amplias (v8), and Stachys (v9).

Salute one another with an holy kiss (v16) is equivalent of our hand shaking. **The churches of Christ salute you**. Not a perfect church by any means, problems and misunderstandings. But wonderful church. Thrilling to be a member there. Workers, courageous, loving, caring and progressive. Men and women, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles – all co-workers and enthusiasts.

Secret of this church

How do you explain all this? Reason and secret? What made this church tick? 10 times in these 16 verses Paul uses the little word "in". This is source and secret of all that he had described. "In the Lord", "in Christ". Serving and working to point of weariness, living for Lord in terrible conditions of slavery, showing love to others, willing to suffer imprisonment and death, living a worthy Christian life, opening home and using resources – all because union with Lord is guarantee of genuine Christianity. Union with Him who died and rose again and alive now for evermore, that alone can produce holiness of heart and earnestness of life.

Never forget for a minute that our salvation, service, courage is only possible as we are in Christ and in the Lord. Faith in Christ and love to Him turns cowards into heroes, rolls sleeves up, teaches us to put ourselves out, opens doors of homes, and makes us doers as well as hearers of the Word. When get near to Christ and get hold of His hand, amazing what we can and will do.

Union with Him brings power and desire to do things which otherwise we would never desire or be able to do. Vain to use other methods to whip people into Christian work. Only one thing which will last and bring out best in us – union and communion with Christ. Therefore live in Him and work in Him. Make sure we are in the Lord. Get closer to Him. The more continuously we realize our individual dependence on Him, the more our lives will blossom into joyful service.

Renew our communion with Him. Else Christian work which was begun well will soon degenerate into routine and become mechanical. Easy in Christian work to begin in Spirit and continue in flesh. So we do work from habit and because people expect it of us or because others do it. Only way we can keep garland fresh is by continually dipping it in fountain. The more we have to do, the more we should heed His call. "Come apart with me and there renew communion with me."