

BIBLE STUDY: ROMANS #16

Scripture of Lesson: Romans 16: 1~27

In this last chapter of his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul recommends Phebe, who would carry his letter to Rome, sends personal greetings to those in Rome whom he knew, and includes greetings from his companions and other Christians in Corinth. Then his final exhortation is included together with praise to God.

1. Paul's personal greetings: v. 1~16

Paul refers to Phebe as 'a servant of the church at Cenchrea,' which is short distance from Corinth eastward, another coastal town. From this we can see that women were a part of the Christian ministry from the early days. Perhaps there was a perceived need for such a female pastoral worker in Rome and Phebe was selected as a good person to fill this need. So she was to carry Paul's letter in person. Her character as a good helper, as described in v. 2, is in contrast to those who 'cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine [v. 17].' While Paul orders them to avoid the latter type of people, he recommends Phebe favorably to provide the support so that she could fit into the pastoral team in Rome quickly. As it was in the first century, we need saints who are willing to provide the needed support to assist the ministry [v. 2].

Then Paul sends his greetings to Priscilla and Aquila and the church in their house. The names of this special couple appear six times, always together and not individually. They can be regarded as the first missionary couple of the Christian church. Paul came in contact with them first in Corinth [Acts 18: 2-3] and they had already become Christians, perhaps in Rome. Because Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome, they left Rome and were now living in Corinth when Paul came there for his missionary work. Priscilla and Aquila provided their home as the base of Paul's missionary work. At the same time Paul and Aquila worked together as tent makers as both shared the skills of tent making. During the 18 months of his mission in Corinth, this couple's support was integral to the propagation of the gospel in the area.

When Paul left Corinth to go to Asia Minor of today's Turkey, Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul and established a home, where the church met in their home. When Apollos came to Ephesus and preached the gospel, Priscilla and Aquila brought him to their home and taught him the doctrine of Jesus Christ in detail to set him right in the doctrine. This tells us that this couple was well equipped in the Christian doctrine and was worthy to be a bishop in the area.

But in this chapter Romans 16 we note that Priscilla and Aquila are now living in Rome with a church in their home. They used to live in Rome and perhaps the situation was turned around to allow many Christians to return to Rome. And there perhaps was the need for couples who are solidly grounded in the truth of Christ to be in Rome to provide a home for churches.

Today, the gospel of Christ is being preached by many married couples whose hearts burn with love of God and love for dying humanity. They are willing to go wherever the Spirit calls them to lay down their lives for the sake of God's kingdom here on the earth.

The third case that is worthy of mention is Rufus and his mother, whom Paul calls his mother. This Rufus is known to be one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene [modern day Libya], the North African Jewish person who carried the cross for Jesus on the way to Calvary, as mentioned in Mark 15:

Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. [Mark 15: 21-22]

As Mark mentions the names of Simon together with their home town, Cyrene, which is a part of today's Libya, we conjecture that Simon's family and others from the same area could have become Christians during the Pentecost event [Acts 2: 10] and that this family of Simon could have lived where Paul labored at one time or another. And Simon's wife, whose name is not mentioned except at Rufus' mother, must have provided a home for Paul and his companions during their evangelical periods. Many people living in the Roman territories were quite mobile in this era. Likely Simon and their other son Alexander might have died along the way and now Rufus and his mother were living in Rome.

Discussion topic: Do you personally know of such couples as Priscilla and Aquila today who are so devoted to God's pastoral or evangelical work? Why is Priscilla's name mentioned before her husband's name here and in other places?

2. Final exhortation and benediction: v. 17~27

The final exhortation of Paul in this chapter is to stay away from those who cause dissension and division in the church against the true doctrine of Christ [v. 17]. False prophets, whose motive is to serve their self-interests and not to serve Christ as His servants [v. 18], think they can easily deceive Christians. Paul is much concerned about such deceivers who attempt penetration into the church and exhorts the Christians in Rome to discern them and to keep them away by being 'wise unto what is good and simple concerning evil [v. 19].' When we retain such an attitude in prayerful spirit, we should be able to 'bruise Satan under our feet.' And we need the grace of Jesus Christ in this effort [v. 20].

Paul's benediction/ praise to God is noteworthy here because in all other letters Paul ends with benediction on the saints, whereas he ends this letter with a praise to God:

*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. [16: 25-27]*

In this expression of praise Paul mentions *'revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest.'* Paul revealed this mystery, which had been revealed to Him by Jesus Christ through His Spirit, in this epistle fully to the Roman Christians. His preaching of the gospel of Christ made this mystery known to peoples of all nations in the Roman jurisdiction through his evangelical journeys. The end of Paul's evangelical labor was to bring both the Jews and the Gentiles to obedience to the faith. And Paul prayed that only God, Him alone, be glorified through Jesus Christ. No mention of any credit to his work or his reward. No self-glorification. May God be praised and glorified!

Discussion topic: Now that we have completed a study of Paul's letter to the Romans, let us share what we have learned and confess our faith in Jesus Christ for edification of everyone in the group.