

Romans 16:1-24

Introduction

1. Paul ends his letter to the Romans as he does many of his letters, with greetings to individual believers.
2. In the first 16 verses he sends personal greetings to 24 different individuals
3. In verses 21-23 he sends greetings to the Romans from eight of his traveling companions
4. He also includes a warning in vs. 17-20
5. Like much of chapter 15, with the exception of vs. 17-20, there's not much here in terms of instructions or direct practical application
6. However, there are a number of observations we can make that are helpful in our walk with Jesus

A. The first observation is that believers in the early Church found fellowship and worshipped in small, local, somewhat autonomous bodies

1. Early Christians didn't have access to large, dedicated church buildings
2. Initially, Jewish Christians met in homes and the temple (Acts 2:46) and possibly the synagogues (James 2:1-3), but most Christians met in homes
3. Paul mentions at least three such house churches in Romans 16:
 - a. V. 5: Priscilla and Aquila (5): "**also greet the church that is in their house**"
 - b. V. 10: "**Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.**"
 - c. V. 15: "**Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.**"
4. Most homes were fairly small so it's likely that they met in the homes of the more prominent or wealthy Christians—archeology tells us that the atriums or courtyards of such homes could accommodate up to 70 or 80 people for worship:
 - a. Paul mentions a man named Gaius in 16:23 who was a "**host to me and to the whole church**" and may have owned such a home and hosted a church—this may have been the same Gaius to whom the letter of 3rd John was written (it reads like it was addressed to someone responsible for overseeing a small church)
 - b. Philemon, another fairly wealthy man, hosted a church in his home (Philemon 1:2)
 - c. Paul mentions a woman in Colossae named Nympha who hosted a church in her house (Colossians 4:15)
 - d. Priscilla and Aquila, also mentioned by Paul, were likely fairly well off since tent making was a rather lucrative business (which might explain why Paul was able to support his needs and those of his traveling companions only working part time)
5. This appears to have remained the primary practice for at least the first 300 years of the Church
 - a. There is no archeological evidence of large, dedicated church structures during that time
 - b. It wasn't until the Roman Emperor Constantine signed the Edict of Milan in 313 A. D. that things began to change:
 - 1) The Edict outlawed the persecution of Christians and made freedom of religion the law of the Roman Empire

- 2) Shortly thereafter, Constantine began to pour time, resources and money into building physical church buildings, partly because he thought it would unify and strengthen a splintering Roman empire
 - 3) Then, in 325 A.D. he called the Council of Nicea in an attempt to unify Christianity all under one formal church hierarchy which ultimately became the Catholic church with its large dedicated buildings, formal liturgical Mass, etc. and the concept of the church family or body changed drastically
 - 4) Even some 1200 years later with the Reformation, most of the protestant denominations that sprang up still focused on formal worship, dedicated buildings, etc. where the Church body shows up once a week to “worship” and then goes home until next week
- c. Some interesting stats:
- a. Church attendance in the US began to decline in the 1960s and 70s
 - b. However, it remained fairly steady for the next 30 years
 - c. But in the last 15 years the decline has been massive—nearly twice what it was in the 60s and 70s
 - d. I wonder if this is related to the mega-church phenomenon (those over 5,000 in attendance):
 - 1) Mega-churches are not new—they’ve been around since the 1800s
 - 2) However, in the US, there’s been an explosion of mega-churches over the last three decades—a nearly fivefold increase in number and attendance and these numbers continue to grow
 - 3) And their influence goes way beyond the walls of their churches because much of the material found in Christians bookstores, on radio and TV, pod-casts, the internet, etc. is produced by these massive Christian ministries
 - e. I just wonder how this “bigger is better” approach to church has affected us
 - f. Are we missing the intimacy fostered in the early church?

B. A second observation is that these local churches were filled with believers who were dedicated to working hard

1. Phoebe (1-2):
 - a. Very little is known about Phoebe because she is only mentioned here in the NT, but Paul does give us some interesting details
 - b. She was a believer from Cenchrea which was about 8 miles from Corinth (from where Paul was likely writing this letter) and based on her name she was likely a Gentile
 - c. Paul refers to her as a “**servant of the church which is at Cenchrea**”
 1. He uses the Greek word diakonos or deacon
 2. In the NT it is used to simply refer to servants, but also to the role of deacon in the local church body
 3. It’s unclear whether Paul is referring to her simply as a Christian servant or more specifically as an official deacon within the church at Cenchrea
 4. The fact that Paul calls her a deacon “**of the church which is at Cenchrea**” would seem to suggest the latter

- d. To **“commend”** means to recommend or approve of someone with the implication that others accept that recommendation
 - 1) Paul asked them to **“receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints,”** (2)
 - 2) He also asked them to **“help her in whatever matter she may have need of you”**—the word for “matter” here may indicate a specific issue or need that Phoebe may have had
 - e. This was because he had been a **“helper of many, and of myself as well”**
 - 1) The NIV and Holman translations refer to her as a “benefactor”
 - 2) The Greek word *prostatis* is only used on time in the NT, but in secular Greek it refers to a patron or protectress which is someone who gives financial support to someone else
 - 3) Paul may very well have that in mind here; Phoebe may have been a prominent woman of means in Cenchrea who used her wealth to serve Paul and others
 - 4) This would fit well with Paul commendation of her and his request that his readers help her with whatever matter she had
2. Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila (3): **“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus”**
- a. We first met these two in Acts 18 where we learn they were originally from Italy but were kicked out of Rome when the Roman’s expelled all the Jews
 - b. They were tent makers like Paul (Acts 18:3)
 - c. They were responsible for helping Apollos understand the Scriptures more accurately (Acts 18:24-28)—and Apollos went on to be a tremendous debater of the Jews and leader in the Church
 - d. Paul refers to them as **“my fellow workers in Christ Jesus”**--They ministered with Paul in Corinth and he then dropped them off at Ephesus to begin a ministry there while he continued on to Antioch (Acts 18:18)--He eventually returned to Ephesus and continued to minister with them for before Paul eventually returned to Ephesus and ministered with them for another three years or so
 - e. Paul also writes that they saved his life (4): **“who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;”**—Paul doesn’t state how or when, but it’s possible it was during the riot at Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:23-41)
 - f. Finally, he mentions that they led a home church (5a): **“also greet the church that is in their house.”**
3. Others:
- a. Mary (6): **“Greet mary, who has worked hard for you.”**
 - b. Andronicus and Junias (7): **“who are outstanding among the apostles”**
 - c. Urbanus (9): **“Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ...”**
 - d. Apelles (10): **“Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ”**
 - e. Tryphaena and Tryphosa (12a): **“Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord.”**
 - f. Persis (12b): **“Greet Persisthe bellowed, who has worked hard in the Lord.”**
 - g. Timothy (21): **“Timothy my fellow worker greets you...”**
 - h. Gaius (23): **“Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you.”**

C. A third observation is that this partnership in the Gospel (the hard work described above) led to a kinship with and fondness between Paul and his readers

- 1. V. 5: **“Greet Epaenetus, my beloved”**

2. V. 7: **"Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners,"**
3. V. 9: **"Stachys my beloved"**
4. V. 11: **"Greet Herodion, my kinsman"**

D. A fourth observation is that the early church faced the constant threat of false teaching (17-20)

1. Paul's letters to the Colossians, Galatians, Thessalonians, and even the Corinthians to some degree, as well as Jude's letter, were written to combat false teaching
2. 1 and 2nd Timothy were written to equip Timothy to combat false teaching at Ephesus and within the Church as a whole
3. Here in Romans 16:17-20 we see Paul giving the Romans a general warning about false teachers
 - a. He warns them to keep on eye on such men and reject them (17): **"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."**
 - b. He writes that they are not slaves of Jesus but of their own appetites (18): **"For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites;"**
 - c. They use their flattering speech to deceive (18b): **"and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."**
4. He encourages them to be discerning: **"For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil"** (both references to teaching)
5. And, reminds them that ultimately God would destroy to One who is ultimately at the root of all false teaching (20): **"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."**

Conclusion