

Romans 16 – Fellow-workers

Paul draws to the end of this long letter as many of us would, with greetings to the people who are known to those receiving the letter, but this is a little different: The letter is addressed to *'all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints'* (**Romans 1:7**), so all these people named in **ch.16** are receiving this letter as well as being greeted in it by name (and often commended). Perhaps a little embarrassing for them to be mentioned personally when this letter was read out loud to the assembled company but, on the other hand, Paul is actually commending them to their own fellowship members and giving them recognition which might otherwise pass unnoticed. He has high regard for many of these brothers and sisters, and he wants their fellow-believers in Rome to share that high regard – as well, of course, as actually refreshing the relationships he has with them and encouraging them personally!

Let's look briefly at some of these people:–

Phoebe from Cenchrea. It looks like she was on her way to Rome and was maybe even the 'postman' carrying this letter from Paul in Corinth to the church in Rome. Cenchrea was very close to Corinth and is mentioned in **Acts 18:18** as the place where Paul had a haircut on his way from Corinth to Ephesus. It is the port on the eastern coast of the isthmus at Corinth.

Prisca (aka **Priscilla**) and **Aquila**. Almost worth a study in their own right! Jews who, like Paul, were tentmakers by trade, they had been kicked out of Rome when Paul first met them in Corinth (**Acts 18:1-3**). Evidently a good relationship grew as he worked alongside them, no doubt taking the opportunity to disciple them at the same time! We don't know whether it was he who led them to the Lord, but they were certainly very clear about the gospel and were well able to fill in some gaps for Apollos! (**Acts 18:24-26**) It seems very likely that it was Apollos who had passed on an incomplete gospel message to the 12 disciples whom Paul met in Ephesus in **Acts 19:1-7**, so maybe their help to Apollos was very similar to Paul's to those 12.

Paul is sending a greeting to them there in Rome, so evidently they had moved back! Long before that, they had travelled with him from Corinth to Ephesus (which is where they had met up with Apollos) and had lived there for quite a while. Paul describes them as *'my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles'* and passes on greetings to *'the church that is in their house'* there in Rome (**Romans 16:3-4**).

They had done the same in Ephesus. When Paul writes to Corinth from there, he sends greetings from them and *'the church that is in their house'* (**1 Corinthians 16:19**) In **2 Timothy 4:19**, Paul (writing from Rome) sends greetings to them again, so they were evidently not still in Rome. Maybe back in Ephesus, which seems to have been Timothy's home base. These two were effective on a much greater scale than we have any record of!

The list goes on! Paul has a link with each one: fellow-workers, relatives and others with whom he has evidently formed close relationships. There are at least 24 names here. Although, as it seems, Paul had not visited Rome when he wrote this letter, he already knows a lot of people who are there! They must have met him at other times in his travels and personal history, and perhaps the existing contact paves the way for him to write this letter to the whole church there in Rome.

Why has he written such a long (and fairly comprehensive) letter to these people? In the first chapter, he made it clear that he wants to be able to contribute to their spiritual growth and development (**Romans 1:11-15**), as well as hoping to come and see them as soon as possible.

But there may be additional reasons, as he says here in **Romans 16:17-19**. It seems that there is some trouble there, stirred up by *'those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned'*, and he urges the believers to 'turn away' from them.

The reports which Paul has received about the church in Rome have been very positive, which of course makes him happy, but he wants to be sure that they will stay true to the Lord in the face of opposition. The reference to Satan in **v.20** shows that there is definitely a spiritual battle going on there in Rome, and the basis of sound teaching with which he has filled this letter should prove very useful to them in that struggle.

Especially, perhaps, his teaching about our being dead to our old life and alive in the new 'resurrection life' which is ours in Christ (**chapters 6,7 & 8**). They need to be secure in Christ, in order not to be tricked by *'smooth and flattering speech'* which can so easily *'deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting'* (**v.18**). More hints of this in **v.25**.

A few more greetings, this time from some of Paul's companions:— Timothy we know quite a bit about, but Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius are pretty much unknown. The gospel has apparently made some impact there in Corinth, as the city treasurer Erastus is a believer. My guess is that this is not the same Erastus as in **Acts 19:22**. Perhaps Gaius could be the same man who was travelling with Paul in **Acts 19:29**. Luke says that he and Aristarchus had come from Macedonia, so maybe he had now settled down in Corinth. In any case, he is now acting as *'host to me and to the whole church'* and so proving to be a valuable asset there.

Even in his parting blessing (**v.25-27**), Paul can't resist emphasising again the fact that the 'mystery' which has been a secret for generations has now been manifested (literally 'made to shine out') into all the nations by God's command and that this shining out leads to 'the obedience of faith'. And not just to get them started in their walk of faith, but so that they would be established, (literally, 'made solid'). That is what Paul's preaching and teaching is all about! (Reminds me of his comments in **Colossians 1:28**)

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