

LAST MESSAGE FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS

TEXT: ROMANS 16:1-27

INTRODUCTION:

1. The *Scofield Study Bible* entitles Romans chapter 16, “The outflow of Christian love.”
2. “The law of love toward the neighbor” (cf. 13:8-10).
3. “The law of love concerning doubtful things” (14:1—15:3).
4. William Newell, in his commentary on the book of Romans, also notes the emphasis on love in Romans chapter 16. “This sixteenth chapter is neglected by many to their own loss. It is by far the most extensive, intimate and particular of all the words of loving greeting in Paul’s marvelous letters. No one can afford to miss this wonderful out pouring of the heart of our apostle toward the saints whom he so loved.”
5. There are 35 persons mentioned in this chapter. Though the Roman Catholic Church refers to Peter as “the bishop of Rome,” he is not mentioned and there is no evidence he was ever in Rome.

I. PAUL’S COMMENDATIONS AND GREETINGS (16:1-16)

1. Phoebe is mentioned first. “I commend unto you Phebe” (16:1).
2. Commendatory letters were frequently used in the ancient world, and whenever the early Christians traveled from one church to another, they carried letters of introduction (cf. II Cor. 3:1).
3. Phoebe was a “servant of the church which is at Cenchrea,” the eastern seaport of Corinth. Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth, and Phoebe delivered this epistle for him.
4. Some have taught that Phoebe was a “deaconess,” because the Greek word translated “servant” is *diakonos*.
5. She may have been a deaconess, though more than likely she was a faithful, dependable worker (“servant”) in the church (cf. Matthew 23:11 – “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant (*diakonos*).”
6. Phoebe apparently had “business” to attend to in Rome, and Paul asked the believers in Rome to “assist her in whatsoever business she hath need” of them (16:2).

7. Next, Paul writes, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus” (16:3). Like Paul, Priscilla and Aquila were tent-makers (cf. Acts 18:1-3). “My helpers” (16:3).
8. After the emperor Claudius died, Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome, where they were living and ministering when Paul wrote this epistle.
9. Later Aquila and Priscilla returned to Ephesus. In the apostle Paul’s last recorded words, he wrote, “Salute Priscila and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus” (II Tim. 4:19).
10. A church met in their home (Romans 16:3-5), which was customary in the early days of Christianity. Historians say churches met in homes for at least two hundred years, and there is no clear example of a separate building set apart for Christian worship before the third century.
11. “Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits (first convert to Christ in Asia) of Achaia unto Christ”(16:5b). We know nothing about Epaenetus or most of the others mentioned in verses 5—12, 14, 15.
12. Women are prominently mentioned in Romans 16 – Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, as well as Rufus’ mother, and Nereus’ sister. This emphasizes the wide sphere of influence of women in the apostolic church.
13. Mary is said to be a particularly good worker. “Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us” (16:6).
14. Rufus (16:13) may be the son of Simon of Cyrene, who helped our Lord carry His cross (Mark 15:21).
15. The “holy kiss” (16:16) was a friendly Oriental form of greeting, with men greeting the men, and women the women. It would be similar to our custom of hand-shaking today.

II. PAUL’S WARNING REGARDING TROUBLE-MAKERS (16:17, 18).

1. God hates those who sow discord among the brethren.
2. “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

3. Trouble-makers do a lot of damage to churches. That is why the Word of God tells us to “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (16:17).

4. Pastors have the responsibility of feeding the flock, but they also have to protect the flock from wolves. Wolves in sheep's clothing are everywhere destroying churches, and sadly, too many preachers are sitting by and allowing it to happen.

5. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

6. The apostle Paul said in Acts 20:29, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."

7. Peter said in II Peter 2:1, 2, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways."

8. Jude said, "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

9. And getting back to Romans 16:17, 18, the apostle Paul says we are to "mark them" and to "avoid them."

10. All doctrine and all teachers are to be tried according to the Word of God. Isaiah 8:20 says, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

11. Therefore, we must “mark them” and “avoid them” (Rom. 16:17).

12. Many of the “divisions”(16:17) today start with music and dress standards. Years ago, Gordon Sears said, “When the standard of music is lowered, then the standard of dress is also lowered. When the standard of dress is lowered, then the standard of conduct is also lowered. When the standard of conduct is lowered, then the sense of value in God’s truth is lowered.”

13. The same word “divisions” is found in I Corinthians 3:3, “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

14. Carnal church members “cause divisions” so we must “mark them” and “avoid them.”

15. The same Greek word translated “divisions” here in Romans 16:17 is translated “seditions” in Galatians 5:20.

16. “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 6:19-21).

17. These carnal trouble-makers do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, “but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (16:18).

18. In Philippians 3:18, 19, Paul says that they are “the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

19. “And by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (16:18b). Many false teachers are smooth talkers and great orators.

III. PAUL’S CONCLUDING REMARKS AND BENEDICTION (16:19-27)

1. Paul commended them for their obedience (16:19; cf. verse 26b). Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

2. Jesus said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

3. Many people profess to be saved, but they live like the devil. If a person is genuinely saved, he will be obedient to the Word of God (16:19, 26).

4. “But yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (16:19b).

5. "Simple" literally means "unmixed." The Christian's life is to be good and pure, and must be "unmixed" with sin and evil.
6. He is "to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).
7. "Simple" (Romans 16:19) means "innocent."
8. A pastor friend of mine told me he had to pull his daughter out of a Christian college because the girls in her dorm were constantly talking about dirty television shows like "Friends." She had never seen the show and was uncomfortable with their worldly conversation.
9. She was "wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (16:19b). The pastor was right to move her out of there.
10. I do not agree with John MacArthur on some things, but I agree with this statement: "Many Christians rationalize watching degrading movies and TV programs by claiming they need to be familiar with the ways of the world in order to better analyze secular culture and be better prepared to witness to those who are worldly. But it is not necessary to sift through garbage to recognize it for what it is, and the more we are around it the more we pick up its stench. The more willingly we associate with evil, the more it will drag us down to its level."
11. Romans 16:20 should be compared to Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the woman (Eve), and between thy seed and her seed (Christ); it (the seed of the woman, Christ) shall bruise thy head, and thou (Satan) shalt bruise his heel."
12. There will be no lasting peace in this wicked world until "the God of peace" crushes Satan. This will happen when the "Prince of Peace" returns to earth. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).
13. Timotheus and Lucius (16:21) probably refers to Timothy and Luke.
14. "Jason and Sosipater" (16:21) were Paul's "kinsmen." This could mean they were related by blood, or in a wider sense, of the same nation, in other words, "fellow countrymen" or "fellow Jews."
15. A man named Jason hosted Paul and Silas in his home in Thessalonica. This is probably the same Jason mentioned here in Romans 16:21.
16. Sosipater is probably the man from Berea named Sopater in Acts 20:4.
17. Paul dictated this letter to Tertius (16:22), who was Paul's amanuensis (secretary). Apparently Paul dictated all of his letters, with the exception of his epistle to the Galatians. Galatians 6:11 says, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand."
18. The "large letters" suggest Paul may have had an eye problem. "For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. (Galatians 4:15b).

19. Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth. Gaius, Paul's host (16:23a), probably had "the whole church" of Corinth meeting in his house. Gaius is mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 1:14.
20. "Erastus the chamberlain (treasurer) of the city" of Corinth (16:23b) is referred to in Acts 19:22 and II Timothy 4:20.
21. The Gospel had spread into all levels of society. In Philippians 4:22, Paul refers to saints in Caesar's household.
22. We know nothing about "Quartus a brother" (16:23b). His name means "fourth." Tertius (16:22) means "third." These were names given to slaves.
23. It is possible their names simply meant, "Son number 3" and "Son number 4," but most people give proper names to their children.
24. The churches had civic leaders like Erastus as well as slaves.
25. Verse 24 is Paul's benediction, and verses 25—27 are an appendix.

CONCLUSION:

In his commentary on the book of Romans, W.H. Griffith Thomas says the epistle is regarded as Paul's greatest letter, and he gives the following list:

1. Doctrinal Value – justification, sanctification, etc.
2. Practical Value (cf. 12:1, 2)
3. Historical Value – the gospel is the power of God... "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (1:16).
4. Dispensational Value – chapters 9—11
5. Philosophical Value – philosophy of religion, of law, etc.
6. Psychological Value – problem of sin, powerlessness of human nature
7. Spiritual Value – the Gospel is "the power of God"
8. Prophetic Value – "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer" (11:26).

9. Evidential Value – Griffith Thomas says that Paul's "testimony to Christ and Christianity (are) of the highest possible value" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).