

The Final Word

As many of you know I love buying CDs, I love listening to music of all kinds. What you may not know is that I also love reading the booklets that come with them. Not just the lyrics but all the notes and the thanks and credits at the end. You may think this makes me a bit of a nerd but you learn a lot about the music context of the music that you are listening to, its background, who helped to make it, all of which can deepen the enjoyment.

Romans 16 can seem a bit like that. We have heard a wonderful symphonic presentation of the Christian faith and now we have list of names, with thanks and credits. This is a historic goldmine for some understanding of the early Christian communities. But this is not just for theological nerds. If we pay close attention we will see that it not only will help us understand more of the life of faith then, it will strengthen us as we live as Christ's people now.

HISTORY

As we read Romans 16 with its variety of unusual names we are reminded that we are reading a document from a different time and place.

This may be God's word for us but it was not written to us.

We learn that Paul is writing at Gaius' house with the help of Tertius, who rather cheekily adds his own greetings in to the letter. Paul is with Timothy and others that we know from other New Testament writings, and some that we don't know. Of particular interest is Erastus, the city treasurer, for whom there is an ancient which shows even at this early stage Christianity was making inroads in higher society.

The letter was delivered to Rome by a lady called Phoebe who is described as a deacon of the Church in Cencreae about 6 miles east of Corinth. She would have travelled to Corinth to collect the letter from the house of Gaius where Paul was staying before a journey of around two weeks by land and sea

There the various house churches which are mentioned in the passage would have gathered together to listen to the letter and some would have been delighted to hear their own names being added at the end of this great letter.

It would no doubt have given great prestige to those who has Paul's stamp of approval. (Which is perhaps Paul's point as he will go on to talk about those who cause division and place obstacles who are clearly not mentioned.)

It all helps remind us that Romans was not written as a theological treatise but as a letter to real people. Paul expected his words to impact these people. He was speaking to them in their situation. I find this encouraging as I consider all that is written in Romans, whilst our world is very different, we can and should expect God to speak to us and our situation through his word.

This is why I asked for people to tell me what they have learnt from this great book.

Mary Hope and peace. 10:9 states that " If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved" No ifs and buts just a direct promise from God the Father.

Andrew The Importance of serving others

Mandy I personally received a strong cemented assurance of the 'Completed work of Jesus on the Cross'. I come to my God, confidently through the blood of the lamb. All of Jesus, nothing of me. My sins 'Paid in Full'. I feel so humbled and thankful.

Sirpa What did I learn from Romans ... Absolutely NOTHING ! 😊 Well actually I did learn that there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ, ie those who believe and trust in Him as their Lord and Saviour ! Hallelujah Amen !

You What about you what have you learnt. This is God's word to strengthen us. I pray that it has you in your faith.

PAUL'S GREETINGS

You may say Richard this is very interesting, this is what we can learn from the whole letter but is there anything we can learn from this chapter and all those names.

I do think it humanises Paul, here we see him greeting his friends, and I see a humility here that we can miss if we don't pay close attention to his writings, he knows he is not alone in his work.

This is strengthened when we note the way that he speaks about his friends and colleagues.

- Fellow workers in the Lord
- In Christ before I was
- Loved in the Lord.
- Tested and approved in Christ
- Worked hard in the Lord.

Here we see that Paul understands the mission of Christ is a joint effort involving many people. It makes me wonder how do we think of our fellow Christians, are we as generous and humble in our thinking. It is not clear that Paul knew all of these people personally (he certainly knew many) but they are all warmly and generously greeted.

We also should note who some of these people are. Ten of the twenty seven people listed are women, the first two mentioned are women and he seems to describe a husband and wife team, Andronicus and Junia, as apostles, although this is a much debated verse.

This is not the time to delve deeply into the issue of women in ministry but it least means that Paul clearly has women in mind as he writes the book of Romans. All the salvation that he speaks of is fully available to them just as it is to Jews and Gentiles. The call to ministry in Romans 12 also must apply to them. It is also interesting to consider that the first preacher on Romans may have been Phoebe, as she may have helped the Roman Christians understand some of Paul's trickier passages.

Putting the passage to work

So as we put this passage to work do we, all of us, think of ourselves as co-workers in the Lord, working hard in the Lord. Are we doing our part to build up the community of God's people? Here are some thoughts from this passage.

Names

We can't help but notice that the passage is full of names. Do we know each others names?

It seems to me that Paul has the much longed for spiritual gift of remembering names, one I don't have. But we can work at it. Introduce ourselves, perhaps for the second time, and use the name, it can bring great joy.

We are producing a renewed Parish Directory to help.

Generous Thanks

We can speak generously to each other as Paul does here, giving thanks for the work we see going on around us. Thank our readers, choristers, vergers, sidesman welcomers, camera operators, we are all co-workers for God. We can note that Paul is quite specific in his thanks. Further he is not just thankful, it is always in the context of their faith. So we shouldn't just be thankful, we should be thankful to God.

Practical Expressions of Community

But there is also a verse tucked away here beloved of teenage youth groups. v16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. Now the holy kiss is hardly appropriate in these socially distancing times but we shouldn't miss what Paul is doing.

This was a practical expression of welcome and fellowship across cultural, religious and even gender divides of the culture. Imagine how powerful it would have been for a Christian master to greet his slave with a kiss or greeting. It's hard to imagine

a more powerful image of the power of the Gospel bringing true unity. Paul is calling for an acting out the wideness of God's welcome which his letter teaches. Men, women, Jew, Gentile, slave, free are all to be greeted in Christ.

If we consider this we may find that our own meetings will start to change as we truly seek to greet each other as fellow Christians, loved in the Lord. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus so we should not be separate from each other.

We can't do our peace where we express this. So perhaps as this passage speaks to us at this point in our history let us greet each other which our holy elbow!

THE NEED FOR UNITY: THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Behind this working to build up the community is the truth on which the community is built and which Paul has been teaching in his letter. If we were to summarise all that he has written, the basis of the Church is in v20 "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is this Jesus centred grace that is the heart and soul of Christian unity.

Paul has taught that we are saved by grace. By grace we have been justified, moved from team Adam to team Jesus, we have been given a ticket on Grace Airways and because it is all based on grace nothing we do can damage our relationship with God. We are then in view of this grace are to live this grace out in our lives. The wonderful picture of Christian loving living in Chapter 12 is living out of the grace we have received.

All of this is all true because of Jesus, and only true in Jesus, it is his faithfulness, what he has won for us on the cross and resurrection, he is the team captain, he is the pilot of the plan. Paul cannot help but think in terms of Jesus, even in this chapter of credits Jesus is named 10 times in 27 verse. We are to Christocentric.

By grace there is no condemnation, and in Jesus nothing can separate us from God's love. All of what Paul has been teaching then is about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The greatest threat to Christian unity is when one element of this is abandoned, either grace or the focus on Jesus. If there is teaching that moves us away from grace or Jesus we are to have nothing to do with it, Paul echoing Jesus teaching says that we are to be wise to what is good and guileless on what is evil however attractive it may sound. The primal sin leading team Adam was to doubt God's good word. If we are tempted to move from grace or Jesus it is the same voice but we are reminded that the God of peace will crush the source of temptation under our feet. Let us be wise to such schemes and stay focused on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

TO GLORY OF GOD

And so we come to the final word.

The letter to of Romans started with the Gospel of God which was about the righteousness of God. Is no surprise then that the letter ends with giving God the glory. The gospel is first and last about God.

Paul seems tired, or he just tries to put too much into the final sentence has one last go at reminding his readers of his teaching where his desire to put Jesus at the centre gets of good grammar. May we be as determined to put Jesus front and centre.

As we come to the final word in this series we could summarise this final paragraph in a way that summarises the whole letter.

God will strengthen us through the proclamation of Jesus Christ, who has God has always promised brings the salvation of God to all nations through the obedience of faith. To this only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever. Amen.