

Romans 16

By: Charles Stanley

From: On the Epistle to the Romans

We now have the closing remarks and salutations. The Lord would not have the devoted Phebe forgotten. She was a deaconess, or servant, of the church in Cenchrea. “That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also.”

These verses throw much light on the true character of the deacon, as appointed by the apostles before the failure of the church set in so sadly. There is not a shadow of the modern clerical idea. “A succorer of many.” Evidently this was in temporal things. She was to be received IN THE LORD, in that relationship. And what beautiful love and care. She is to be assisted in whatsoever business she has in Rome. It might then be said, See how these Christians love one another.

At this time, also, we find Priscilla and Aquila in Rome, and their devotedness is noted. There were no St. Peters then, but “the church that is in their house.” And, unto verse 16, we have various companies of saints, which appear to belong to different houses, all forming the one assembly of God in Rome. (See vss. 14-15.)

“And the brethren that are with them;” or, “all the saints which are with them.” There were those then that took an oversight of these several companies of brethren, or saints. Such were called elders, or overseers, in other early epistles. But why is there no Bishop of Rome addressed? Simply and evidently because there was no such person. No, it is most remarkable that there is not one word in this Epistle that can be used as an authority for the episcopacy of Rome. How strikingly this displays the foreknowledge and wisdom of God!

Now contrast the Rome of that day with this. To return to the church as it was in Rome, as found in these salutations, what should we find? No pope or bishop of Rome, no cardinals,

no clergy, no monks or nuns; not a single priest performing mass; no grand buildings, called churches. But we should find different gatherings of saints by calling, knowing their sins forgiven; justified from all things; having peace with God; able to admonish one another.

All these assemblies, in certain houses or places, were under the care of the Holy Spirit, and laboring brethren are named in each company — the whole being members of the one body of Christ. We are compelled to own that there is no similarity whatever between the church in Rome in the year A.D. 60, and the Church of Rome in these days. Rome is evidently a departure from the true church of God.

Is it not remarkable that the only official person named — if we may so regard the deaconess — is a woman. And, lest the persons saluted should be regarded, or referred to, as priests, or *episcopoi*, women are named amongst them. How beautiful it was when they were thus brethren dwelling together in the unity of the Spirit, and some of the brethren laboring much in the Lord — such as “the beloved Persis.” Dear young believer, is there any reason why we should not be content with the same simplicity now?

Verse 17: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause [or form] divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. There are two things here we must carefully notice. Division is an evil in itself; it is strongly condemned in other scriptures. (See 1 Cor. 1; 3.) We also learn, that if any are practicing that evil, by causing or forming divisions, contrary to the doctrine they had received, others were to avoid them; that is, to separate from them. But if believers do thus separate from and avoid those who form divisions, do they not also form a sect, or division? No, obedience to the word is not division. And, further, those who cause divisions may always be known by the spirit in which they act.

For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ. We never go wrong if Christ is the only

object. Happy is it when it can be said, “For your obedience is come abroad unto all men.” “Yet I would have you wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil.” It is most deadening to all spiritual life to be occupied with evil.

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” That is certain: whether he persecutes or seduces, it is but for a little while. He still is the accuser, but shortly he will be cast down. In the meantime, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”

This is repeated — Verses 20, 24. Yes, the grace, the unclouded favor, unchanging love, sovereign and free, be with you all. Then follow the salutations of others. But even Timotheus is “my workfellow.” What unfeigned humility and brotherly love!

As Paul commended the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20), so here he says, “Now to Him that is of power to stablish you, according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest [and by prophetic scriptures, *New Translation*], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations, for the obedience of faith. To God only wise be glory, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.”

Yes, God is able to stablish all believers according to that which Paul calls “my gospel,” my glad tidings. The glad tidings committed to Paul have a wide range. The solid foundation of those glad tidings we have seen unfolded in this Epistle — the righteousness of God revealed in justifying the ungodly — both as to sins, up to Romans 5:11, and also as to sin, Romans 5:12

to 8:4. It also contains the glad tidings of deliverance from sin and law; peace with God; no condemnation to them in Christ Jesus, whether as to sins, or sin; and no possible separation from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Here is also just a reference to a still further revelation, of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began. This mystery is fully explained in Ephesians 3. This was not made manifest in the scriptures of Old Testament times. How could it, since it was then kept a profound secret? But it was revealed by prophetic scriptures, that is, of the New Testament.

It is, however, remarkable how soon that heavenly mystery was lost, and Christendom went back to an earthly Judaism. It not only put itself under law for righteousness, but set up a worldly church government, in imitation of Judaism; so that soon all trace of the church, as seen in scripture, was lost for long ages. Such is man. He has always become foolish; all his wisdom is folly.

The closing words of the Epistle direct us not to man, or to what calls itself the church, but “To God only wise be glory, through Christ, forever. Amen.” However failed; however the church may fail as a testimony for God on earth; God shall be eternally glorified through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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