

## ROMANS CH.16

### MAJOR THEME: THE GOSPEL: THE RIGHTEOUSNES OF GOD REVEALED IN TRANSFORMED LIVING

#### Hymn: #10 A Mighty Fortress is Our God (BGCS)

*(Modified Outline of John A. Witmer- Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; SP Publications; 1983; p.438)*

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**D) Personal Greetings (Ch. 16:1-16)** It has been said that “All roads lead to Rome” and coming finally to Chapter 16 we are reminded of how true this was in Paul’s day. What may at first glance only appear as long list of greetings of people with difficult names to pronounce, does in fact reveal some real treasures for us. The fact that Paul greets 26 people by name in this letter, 7-9 of whom were women, yet he himself had never set foot in Rome, bears out just how mobile people were in that day and that Rome was a magnet that drew people from all over the empire.

i) V.1-2 Phoebe- “bright/radiant”

- (1) Is the first one mentioned in Ch. 16. She was a “deaconess of the church in Cenchrea” (pronounced “SEN-kree-ay”) and the one whom the Apostle Paul deemed most trustworthy to carry his letter to the Romans, arguably the most important letter ever penned by man under the Holy Spirit’s guidance.
- (2) She had been a “great help”- lit. “a protectoress” to many, including Paul himself. She must have been some kind of woman. When I hear the word protectoress, the image that immediately comes to my mind is that of a mother bear with her cubs. To find yourself between a mother bear and her bubs is to find yourself in serious danger. I was reminded of this two years ago when I made a pilgrimage back to my hometown in the mountains of northern New Mexico. The night we arrived, we heard a report of a man who had been mauled by a bear just on the outskirts of town. Apparently, he was jogging along his normal route when some small grizzly cubs appeared in front of him. Rather than immediately turning around he kept going and payed the price. The grizzly bear is an extremely protective animal mother. According to Bear.org, seventy percent of human deaths caused by grizzly bears are related to a mother grizzly bear protecting her cubs. But grizzly bears are not only protective, they are also instructive. While cubs are with their mother, they watch and learn skills that will allow them to survive on their own. A mother bear’s love is about protecting from and preparing for a harsh world, and leading by example. Phoebe was just such a protectoress.
- (3) These two verse would lead us to imagine Phoebe as enthusiastic, optimistic, spiritually mature, absolutely trustworthy and possessing the bravery and protecting spirit of a mother bear amongst her cubs. May the Lord raise up many more Phobes!

ii) V. 3-5 Priscilla and Aquila

- (1) Were a Jewish couple who had been ordered out of Rome by the Emperor Claudia around 50 AD.
- (2) The second century Roman historian Suetonius, records the reason for this Jewish expulsion writing: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome." (“The Lives of the Twelve Caesars”- Suetonius)
- (3) Louis Feldman in his book “Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans”states that most scholars assume that these disturbances were due to the spread of Christianity in Rome. (Louis H. Feldman, Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans (Oct 1, 1996) ISBN 0567085252 p. 332) At that time Rome did not distinguish between Jews and Christians and saw Christianity as just another Jewish sect. The likely continued appeal by Jews to the Roman authorities to stop the preaching of the early Christians was finally met with their expulsion from Rome.

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- (a) It is debated amongst scholars as to who this “Chrestus” was that Suetonius named, but some believe this is a reference to Christ.
  - (4) Having been expelled from Rome, Pricilla and Aquila went to Corinth where they met the Apostle Paul and co-laboured for a season with him as tent-makers in Corinth. (Acts 18:2-5)
  - (5) Later they accompanied Paul when he left Corinth and travelled to Ephesus. Paul left them Ephesus while he returned to Antioch (Acts 18:18-22). While in Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila formed a “house church” in their own home (1 Cor. 16:19).
    - (a) It was into this home and “house church” that they invited the eloquent but as yet unsaved Apollos and there explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26).
  - (6) They later returned to Rome after some apparently life risking events for which the Apostle Paul was personally grateful as were all the Gentile churches. We don’t know what it was they did, but it must have been a big deal to warrant Paul’s mention.
    - (a) Once back in Rome, they again had the Church in their home (Rom. 16:5). They were a significant couple and wherever they went the Church was either formed or gathered in their home.
    - (b) Though they are not called “apostles”, they were nevertheless highly mobile, foundational to the forming and gathering of the church and were teachers. This is illustrated again as we find them back in Ephesus for a second time at the end of Paul’s life. They appear to have gone back there to support the young apostolic delegate Timothy and his ministry. Paul greets them specifically in 2 Tim. 4:19; the last few words he ever spoke/wrote to us. May the Lord raise up more Pricilla and Aquilas alongside the Phoebe!
- iii) The Church in the home of Aquila and Priscilla is not the only mention of such a house church. Other “house churches” are seen throughout the NT. For example:
- (1) At Laodicea in the home of a woman named Nympha (Col.4:15)
  - (2) At Colossae in the house of Philemon where he and Apphia (presumably his wife) and a gifted brother named Archippus were prominent (Philemon 2)
    - (a) This is the Archippus who had received a ‘work from the Lord’ which Paul exhorted him to complete (Col. 4:17)
  - (3) In v. 14 of this last chapter of Romans Paul greets “Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them.” These five people evidently had something in common, perhaps as leaders of “**the brothers with them**”. This is likely a reference to another house church in Rome.
  - (4) Similarly inv.15 Paul greets Greet “Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and “**all the saints with them**”. Here’s another five people who also evidently had something in common, perhaps as leaders of “the brothers with them” too. This is likely the third reference to a house church in Rome.
  - (5) Finally, in v. 23 Paul mentions “Gaius, whose hospitality he and “**the whole church**” in Cenchrea enjoyed. Evidently, Paul stayed in this house church when he wrote the book of Romans.
  - (6) What a beautiful picture emerges for us to see of the organic, gifted, and led churches in homes all across the Roman Empire.

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- (a) In a recent June 2017 article for Christianity Today titled “China, House Churches, and the Growth of the Kingdom”, Brian Stiller gives us an arresting modern day picture of the power of “Aquilas and Pricillas” in China.
    - (i) He writes “It’s impossible to estimate the number of house churches. A pastor told me that a member of national security estimated that in his city of Nanjing (a population of over 15 million), there were more than 5,000 house churches of 50 plus members. This number did not include house churches with less than 50.”
    - (ii) “The Christian population is guessed at between 80 to 130 (or more) million.”
    - (iii) “It is estimated that two-thirds of Christians attend a house church.”
  - (b) That means, conservatively, there are 66 million believers, which is three times the population of Australia, meeting in house Churches... because they have to. After the communist takeover of China in 1949, the church was forced underground to escape persecution. Watchman Nee, the great Chinese evangelist and teacher whose writings many of us have read was one such persecuted believer. He was arrested in 1952 and spent the last 20 years of his life in a communist prison camp. His last days were spent in 8 hours of hard labor, 8 hours of mind numbing communist propaganda and brain washing, and 8 hours of solitary confinement in a cell in which he suffered indescribably from both the cold and the heat.
  - (c) I pray we may never look with disdain upon the privilege we still have to assemble in our homes as the Church; and to do so, at the moment, without fear of the authorities or prison. I also hope that we may not forget that what happened in China and to Watchman Nee was not all that long ago...a mere 67 years ago.
  - (d) The words of J. Vernon McGee have resonated with me many times the last few years when said “The church began in the home and it will likely end in the home.” Who knows, perhaps we are part of a vanguard for those coming behind us.
- iv) V.6-7 Andronicus and Junias
- (1) Paul refers to these two and others as his “relatives”. This could mean they were “biological” relatives, but it is more likely a reference to them being kinsmen, perhaps from same the tribe of Benjamin as Paul was or from the region of Tarsus where Paul originated from.
  - (2) Paul says they were “outstanding among the apostles” which can be interpreted in two ways:
    - (a) First, in the broad sense that they were “apostles”; that is that they were Christ called and sent ones; “extra local missionaries”, not in the limited sense of apostles as having been with Jesus from John’s Baptism up to the Ascension as were the 12 Apostles (Acts 1:21-22). This broad sense of apostleship and its ministry is one of the fivefold post Ascension NT gifts given to the Church (Eph. 4:11); it is a foundational gift of the church (Eph. 2:20) and has the primary function of making known the “mystery” of Christ’s Church (Eph. 3:5; 1 Cor. 12:28).

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- (b) The second way to understand this is in the sense that Andronicus and Junias were “outstanding”, referring primarily to the “reputation” they had “among the twelve Apostles”.
  - (i) The fact that Paul immediately mentions that these two were “in Christ before I was” suggests they were living in Jerusalem or its vicinity prior to Paul’s Damascus Road experience.
  - (ii) This being the case, I think adds weight to the view that their reputation was known among the twelve rather than being specifically Christ called sent extra local missionaries.
    - 1. The fact they were now in Rome is likely due to the fact that they, along with all the believers, were scattered when the persecution broke out after Stephen’s stoning in Acts 8:2... “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”
- v) V.8-15 in v. 11 Herodion is another “relative” and the greeting to “those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord” may suggest that Narcissus’ household was divided spiritually.
- vi) V. 12 Tryphena, Tryphosis and Persis, are all women who “worked hard in the Lord”. They were called out for a special greeting. Paul was clearly not the misogynist that the liberal, Word of God defying “professing” church makes him out to be. He had great respect, trust and affection for the women in the Church and in his life.

### **E) Final Words (Ch. 16:17-27)**

- i) V. 17-18 Paul warns the Romans to beware of divisive and deceiving false brothers. But he also gives specific instructions to “Keep away from them”. This principle of separation from such people and known evil is a recurrent instruction from the Apostle Paul.
  - (1) 1 Cor. 5:11 “But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.”
  - (2) Titus 3:10 “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him”
  - (3) 2 Tim. 2: 20-21 “In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”
- ii) V. 19 “innocent about what is evil” is lit. “unmixed; pure” in regards to evil. Contextually, this desire would refer to the prior instructions just given about staying away from divisive and false brothers because they were evil.
- iii) V. 20 The soon crushing of Satan under our feet by the God of peace is a clear reference back to the very first Messianic promise and prophecy in the Bible:
  - (1) Gen. 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”
- iv) V.21-24 in v.22 Tertius was Paul’s “amanuensis”; that is he was the one who wrote the dictated letter of Paul to the Romans.
- v) V. 23 Erastus was lit. the city’s steward; a high position in Corinth/Cenchrea

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vi) V. 25-27 The “prophetic writings” which Paul refers to here and which make known the “mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed” are NOT the OT prophets or their writings. The “mystery” is the Church (Eph. 3:3,4,5,9) and was not seen in the OT. He is referring rather to the NT prophets and their writings such as his own along with Peter’s, John’s, Matthew’s, Mark’s, Luke’s and Jude’s.

(1) V.26 “So that all nations might believe and obey”... hearkens us back to Jesus’s Great Commission in Matt. 18:18-20 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(2) Thus, Paul’s letter to the Romans finishes with an evangelical call to action in declaring the major theme of the Book of Romans which is:

### **The Gospel: The Righteousness of God Revealed**

To the only wise God, be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Well, there we have it. We have completed our walk through Romans, the “Cathedral of the Christian Faith”. Remembering that it was this book that so spoke to Martin Luther, resulting in our having the Word of God in our hands today, let us here him once again as we close:

“Martin Luther said of his reading the book of Romans: “It is the true masterpiece of the New Testament, and the very purest Gospel, which is well worthy and deserving that a Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word for word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men’s souls. For it can never be too much or too well read or studied; and the more it is handled the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.”

Let us pray...