**Romans 16:17-27**

Apart from the gospels, I believe this letter to the Romans is the most important book in the New Testament. God, in His infinite wisdom, took a Jewish scholar with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures, gave Him a revelation of the risen Jesus, and inspired him to write the explanation of the fulfillment of the prophecies and of those that are yet to come to pass. He reinterpreted the Old Testament in light of the life and words of Jesus. He was able to set aside the false interpretations he prided himself in knowing and took a fresh look at the Scriptures he loved so dearly. His heart was sincere enough to recognize that the law could tell him right from wrong but did not give him the power to live it (Romans 7:22-24).

In this letter, Paul has shown from the Scriptures that righteousness is ours by faith in the Messiah, Jesus (Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-22). At the same time, there are those who reject that gift and live a life of indulgence in sinful behavior. They worship the creation while ignoring the Creator. Paul tells us that *all* mankind knows God’s righteous decrees, but they refuse to honor God and instead honor those who rebel against God (Romans 1:32; 2:15).

Paul tells us that Jew and Gentile are all sinners in need of salvation (Romans 3:23). However, we can be reconciled to God by faith in Jesus. Jesus’ blood paid the sin debt of all who will come to Him by faith (Romans 5:8-11). Those who do so are to live lives that are dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11-12). With our minds now set on the Spirit, we can serve God and commune with Him in prayer. We look forward to the day when His work in us is completed (Romans 8:6, 29). We live in the peace of knowing that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:38-39).

Then Paul explained God’s plan of bringing the world to Himself, grafting us into the Jewish roots, and looking forward to the day the Jews would believe in Jesus as Messiah (Romans 11:11-12). Chapter 12 began with Paul telling us that we should be living sacrifices, transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2). That was followed by a series of admonitions that remind us of what a living sacrifice should look like in our daily lives. He closed the letter by telling his future plans and sending greetings to those people he knew. We saw the sense of family that the early church had and how worldly status was set aside in the church.

Today we will look at Paul’s final instructions, greetings, and doxology. His closing remarks begin in verse 17. *17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* There are always those who try to bring in some new teaching that in some way contradicts the true message that has been handed down to us. The Word of God has been studied so thoroughly, and Paul and other New Testament writers explained the practical applications of Jesus’ life and teachings so sufficiently under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that new things are usually distortions of some old heresy. At times, I have thought I had seen some new thing in God’s Word only to find there were hundreds of books on that very subject. The main thing in God’s Word is the main thing. It’s about Jesus! He paid our sin debt. It is by grace through faith that we accept the salvation He paid for with His own sinless blood. He conquered death and is coming again. He wants us to let His life be manifest in us (2 Corinthians 4:10). Love Him and love your neighbor (James 2:8). That’s it!

Division comes from pride and ego in people that come into a church and try to draw people into emphasizing anything else than the main thing. There are many non-essential doctrines that we should learn about and on which we should have an opinion. But when we emphasize these over the core teachings, we begin to act contrary to Jesus’ prayer for unity (John 17:20-21). Those false teachings often involve some kind of activity that is supposed to make you think you are better than others who don’t practice whatever it is they are pushing. Should we pray, witness, study the Word, help the needy, sing, and on and on? Of course! But when any individual thing is emphasized and described in a formulaic way, division begins to raise its ugly head. “We do and you don’t.” It’s human nature. We love to think ourselves superior to others. Jesus humbled Himself and served. He taught the truth and brought division (John 10:19), but it was division over the essentials, not the non-essentials.

*18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.* The appetite they serve may be of spiritual pride or ego or even sensuality. They are clever in their appeal and influence those who are naive. The naive can’t imagine the person has an impure motive. Notice that they deceive hearts and not minds. They appeal to the same appetites in others’ old nature. Before the naive person in fellowship can grow to the point of recognizing the weakness in their own heart, they are led into thinking their weakness is something to be tolerated and even encouraged as spiritual. It is crafty (Genesis 3:1). Paul warned the church to watch out for these. We should take heed to his warning.

*19 For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.* While the testimony of the obedience of the church in Rome was spreading, Paul had another warning for them. He asked them to be wise concerning what was good and innocent as to what is evil. Have wisdom toward the good. That is to say the wisdom of God in discerning and practicing what is good. We had an excellent illustration of that in Ravi Zacharias’ teaching on answering questions that are meant to set us at odds with our culture so that our message will not be heard. Whatever the hot button topic is, the world paints a black and white picture of the issue, and anyone that doesn’t agree with the worldly position is, in their mind, ignorant or bigoted. Ravi suggests that the best way to answer those questions that are posed for the purpose of silencing us is to ask if anything is evil. What standard does the questioner use? They will general fall back on their own personal opinion. Then you can ask if you will be allowed to have your own personal opinion without being judged by them?

Ravi points out that there are three worldviews, theonomous, heteronomous, and autonomous. Theonomous is the worldview of God who is Creator whose laws are true and just. Heteronomous is the view that the few should make the rules for the masses. Autonomous system is one in which everyone decides for themselves what is right. While the questioner considers the correct view to be autonomous, they will not give us the freedom to be autonomous. In other words, they will say everyone’s opinion is right except ours. When they judge us as bigoted, they switch from an autonomous view to a heteronomous one. Be wise about what is good. We need to address the world in a way that allows the good to be heard. Practice the good that is most fruitful for the kingdom. See the world and opportunities before us as God sees them.

Being “innocent” toward evil can be translated, “simple” toward evil, or “unmixed” with evil. We need to understand the basic philosophy and mindset in the world around us, but we don’t need to delve into the fine details. When our mind is focused on understanding the darkness of this world, it is difficult to stay unsullied by it (Jeremiah 4:22). Someone has said, “You can’t wade through garbage and stay clean.” The more we see and hear of the darkness, the more opportunities we give our old nature to compromise our testimony.

*20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.* This is the only apparent reference in the New Testament to one of the first promises of a Messiah in the Old Testament. Paul is most likely referring to Genesis 3:15. *15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* The offspring of the woman, Eve, would one day bruise the head of the serpent, Satan. That was God’s very first promise of victory over Satan. A woman (not man and woman, implying a virgin) would one day give birth to a man who would defeat Satan.

Paul applies this verse from Genesis to the body of Christ, the believers in Rome, and sees them fulfilling it as they walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit. That means this is true of all believers since Pentecost who walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit. The God of peace will lead us to complete victory over Satan. That happens to some degree daily, but the moment we step into eternity and see Jesus face to face (1John 3:2), it will be complete in us.

In the previous chapter, we saw God as the God of encouragement and endurance and all hope (Romans 15:5, 13). Now Paul calls Him the God of peace. It almost seems a contradiction that the God of peace will crush Satan. Resistance to peace is rebellion against God. There can be no peace as long as there is sin. As long as the great rebel, Satan is free to do as he will, there will be wars and death and destruction (John 10:10a). It is because God is the God of peace that He will crush Satan. This is one thing the world is confused about. To have peace you must resist evil in the world and in your own life. It is only when you have peace with God through Jesus and obedience to the Holy Spirit that you can really know what peace is. The hearts of men and women are full of turmoil. They are full of passions, desires, conflicts, fear, and uncertainty. That is the heart that has not found peace in the God of peace. But if you have found that peace, you can be certain that God will soon crush Satan underneath your feet.

Paul continues with greetings from some of his fellow workers to those in Rome. *21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.* Timothy was a disciple of Paul’s whom he was grooming to take his place. 1 and 2 Timothy were written specifically to Timothy for instruction and encouragement. Paul told the Philippians that Timothy served with him in the advancement of the gospel like a child with his father (Philippians 2:22).

Lucias most likely refers to Luke but he could also be one of the men that originally commissioned Paul (Acts 13:1-3). Jason and Sosipater were fellow Jews. Jason was one of the first converts in Thessalonica (Acts 17:6-7). Sosipater may be the same person as Sopater from Berea (Acts 20:4).

Paul had Tertius, the secretary who is writing the letter, make his own greeting. *22 I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.* Gaius was one of the first converts of Paul in Corinth. Paul mentions that he was one of only two people that he personally baptized (1 Corinthians 1:14). He must have been a wealthy citizen of Corinth as he hosted Paul and the church met in his home. Again, we see the church had wealthy Roman citizens as well as slaves, all worshipping as one in Christ.

Erastus, as the city treasurer of Corinth, was one of those wealthy politically influential brothers in the church of Corinth. The Greek does not make it clear if Quartus is Erastus brother or simply a brother in Christ. Verse 24 is not in the oldest manuscripts.

Paul has already given three benedictions in chapter 15 (Romans 15:33; 15:13; 15:5-6) so he closes this important letter of the Christian faith with a doxology. *25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—* “Doxology” is a compound word meaning a “word of praise.” There was one earlier in chapter 11:33-36. *33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” 35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

The closing doxology dedicates the letter to God. Doxologies are a like a fountain of praise that bursts forth when a person considers the wonder of God. Paul praises God who strengthens us through the good news and preaching of Jesus. Are you feeling your faith is weak? Meditate on the gospel. Read the words of Jesus. Come to our study in Luke on Wednesday night or the men’s group on Monday evening, or any other Bible class.

Paul goes on to say the particular part of the gospel and preaching of Jesus that strengthens us is the mystery that has now been made known. When we read the writings of Paul, he makes it clear that this mystery is that God is drawing not just the Jews, but people from every nation to be the bride of Christ (Ephesians 3:6). The mystery is that the Holy Spirit indwells and transforms those who come to Christ. The Spirit of God enables their obedience to God. This was something that Paul struggled with before knowing Jesus as the Messiah. He knew obedience from the heart was impossible. He lacked the power within himself (Romans 7:18). The secret that was revealed was that in the Messiah, Christ Jesus, all people who come to Him can be redeemed and made righteous which makes it possible for them to be indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul lived to proclaim this mystery to those who had never heard. Do you want to be strengthened in your faith? Meditate on this truth, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

*27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.* Our God is the only God. He is all wise. Paul wrote this letter to the glory of God. Glory is the outshining of the character of God, which is the subject of our next series. God will receive glory forevermore for His wonderful works through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen?

Questions:

1 Review the key points in Romans.

2 Who do we watch out for and why?

3 How do they deceive others?

4 Go over the illustration of wisdom from Ravi.

5 Discuss Paul’s use of Genesis 3:15.

6 Why does the God of peace crush Satan?

7 How can you know peace?

8 What is a doxology?

9 How can we be strengthened?

10 What is the mystery now known?