

# Romans 16—a Commentary

Dub McClish

Romans 16 is one of the most completely personal sections to come from the pen of Paul or from that of any inspired writer. Of its twenty-seven verses eighteen of them relate to personal commendations, greetings to those in Rome, or greetings being sent to Rome from various ones who knew Paul was writing the letter. In the various commendations and salutations at least thirty-four personal names are mentioned, and numerous others not actually named are included in greetings from several congregations. This chapter, the capstone of the letter, draws the epistle to a close with a final, fervent plea that relates to the entire doctrinal content of the letter, and indeed, to all the Gospel.

The material in these twenty-seven verses falls naturally into the following divisions:

1. Commendation of Phoebe of Cenchrea (vv. 1-2)
2. Greetings to and complimentary descriptions of familiar and unfamiliar (to us) saints and greetings from the churches (vv. 3-16)
3. A closing plea regarding doctrinal purity and proper handling of false teachers (vv. 17-20)
4. Final greetings and a descriptive statement about the Gospel (vv. 21-27)

## Exegesis and Exposition of Romans 16:1-27

### *Chapter 16:1-2: Phoebe of Cenchrea*

**Verse 1:** When Paul left Corinth in the company of Priscilla and Aquila to sail across the Aegean to Ephesus at the close of his second preaching trip, they took ship for the eastward voyage from Cenchrea (Acts 18:18).<sup>1</sup> While there Paul shaved his head due to some unexplained vow. This is the only time this eastern coastal port of Corinth is mentioned in Scripture outside of Romans 16:1. We are told nothing of when or by whom the church in Cenchrea was established, but since only nine miles separated the two cities, its beginning was likely related to the establishment of the church in Corinth. By someone's agency and at some time (both unknown to us) Phoebe had, as had the Corinthians, heard the blessed Gospel, believed, and been baptized (Acts 18:8).

Paul knew Phoebe and her record of faithful service well, describing her as a "servant" of the Cenchrean Church.<sup>2</sup> Was Phoebe a "deaconess"? Some commentators affirm that she was such in an official sense and that the apostolic church had such a class of female "officials" even as it had male deacons.<sup>3</sup> Those who so aver usually do so based on three passages:

1. The reference to Phoebe in the context before us (Rom. 16:1)
2. The description of certain women amid the qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:11)
3. The discussion of the “enrolled” widows in Ephesus (5:9–10)

First, let us consider the case of Phoebe in Romans 16:1. Admittedly, the Greek word *diakonon* (from which our English word *deacon* derives [Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 10,12–13]) is the word translated “servant” in this verse.<sup>4</sup> However, Paul also used *diakonos* to describe civil rulers, who, he said, are “ministers” of God (Rom. 13:4, 6). It is most unlikely that any of them were even Christians, much less deacons.

Even nearer the context of Romans 16:1, Paul calls Christ a *diakonon* (Rom. 15:8, “minister”), but would anyone argue on this basis that He was a deacon in the church? Furthermore, Paul often referred to himself as a *diakonos* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; et al.), but we must understand this to be only in a general sense; not being married (so far as we know), he was not qualified to be a deacon in the church (cf. 1 Tim. 3:12). Why then **assume** an official use for the term concerning Phoebe?

If the term has reference to “official” deacons in the church in Romans 16:1, it is the only place in the letter where it does. The 149 scholars who produced the KJV and ASV render the term “servant” instead of “deaconess” in Romans 16:1, indicating their conviction that Phoebe was no “official” deaconess. Burton Coffman illustrates well the fact that sometimes inspired writers use the same word in both a general sense and a specific sense, which can only be determined by the context:

The New Testament word *apostle* is used in its both official and limited sense and also in a secondary and more general sense when applied to men like Barnabas and Silas, who were not, strictly speaking, “apostles.” The view here is that “deaconess” as applied to Phoebe, in the same manner, does not mean that she was officially a deacon in the church of the Lord.<sup>5</sup>

Second, if Paul had been intending to list the qualifications for another specific class of workers in the church besides bishops and deacons (the subjects of 1 Tim. 3:1–13), he could have as easily used *diakonous* to refer to the women he mentioned in verse 11 as he did to identify the men he described in verses 8, 12, and 13. Instead, he used a generic term which may be translated either “women” or “wives.” If there were deaconesses in the first century church having to meet certain qualifications similar to those of bishops and deacons, 1 Timothy 3:11 would surely have been the most appropriate place thus to indicate. Hendriksen offers the following sensible argument on this point:

On the other hand, the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, with equal clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third office in the church, the office of “deaconesses,” on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons.<sup>6</sup>

Paul’s reference to the women in the midst of the qualifications of elders and deacons is just that—a reference to women (or wives) (1 Tim. 3:11). I suggest that he is referring to the wives of both elders and deacons, since both must have wives to be qualified (vv. 2, 12). But would merely a wife of just any sort meet the demands of the qualifications and responsibilities of these men? Would not the women described in this verse be peculiarly suited to complement the work of an elder or deacon? Are not many men, otherwise qualified to serve as elders or deacons, disqualified on account of their unsuitable wives?

Third, the “enrolled” widows in 1 Timothy 5:9–10 were just that, and to assume that they were deaconesses is eisegesis rather than exegesis. As with Phoebe and Cenchrea, so is the case of these women and Ephesus—they were servants of these respective churches. The mere fact that one serves a church in some capacity does not make one an “official” of any sort in that church.

We have clear orders concerning the qualifications of elders and deacons. That they were to be appointed and that they existed in the early church is a matter of record. We have none of the above for deaconesses. Therefore, with Barclay, Whiteside, and Lipscomb, respectively, I agree: “Sometimes she is called a *deaconess*, but it is not likely that she held what might be called an official position in the church.”<sup>7</sup> “But the use of the word *diakonos*, here translated servant, does not prove that she occupied an official position.”<sup>8</sup> “Some think she was a publicly recognized deaconess, but we find no recognition in the Scriptures of any such class.”<sup>9</sup>

**Verse 2:** Paul not only knew Phoebe but knew her well enough to urge the Romans to receive her as a faithful saint should be received and to help her with every need. Her worthiness was based not only on her faithful service in Cenchrea, but on two additional qualities: She had helped many, and she had personally helped Paul. We know nothing of the particulars of her help to others nor to Paul. Some have conjectured that Paul became ill while at Cenchrea (during which time Phoebe was of great help to him) and that his illness and recovery therefrom were the cause of his self-inflicted baldness.<sup>10</sup> Whatever help Phoebe had rendered was known and appreciated by many for it had touched many besides Paul.

From Paul's commendation of Phoebe by letter let us learn that, as faithful saints move about in whatever age or society, it is wise and Scriptural to take with them such a letter from a respected eldership or preacher. The Ephesian church did the same for Apollos when he went to Achaia (Acts 18:27-28). Paul wrote the Corinthians to receive Timothy and help him (1 Cor. 16:10-11). This salutary practice produces at least two observable benefits: (1) It introduces the newly arrived saint as worthy of fellowship and suggests that he may immediately be trusted with appropriate responsibilities among his new brethren. (Paul well knew the practical value of some means of introduction to unfamiliar brethren. He was at first refused fellowship in Jerusalem for lack of such but was received when Barnabas vouched for him [Acts 9:26-30]). (2) It preserves the church from the immoral person or false teacher who might corrupt the church to which he moves.

We need to restore this practice! Not all who neglect to secure such a letter are to be mistrusted, but those who bear such a letter are certainly a welcome sight to any church that is determined to remain faithful to the Lord. The church now has tens of thousands of members who are permissive and liberal in both morals and doctrine. Since so many people move about the country for various reasons, local churches must exercise caution in accepting those who wish to "place membership." A clever, smooth-talking false teacher can move in and divide a church in a few months' time (cf. Rom. 16:17-18). A couple living in an adulterous marriage can so gain the sympathies of members of the church in a short time that, by the time their unworthiness of fellowship is discovered, those sympathetic to them may cause serious trouble if the adulterers are withdrawn from.

The following practice would benefit every congregation: When people who are strangers to the congregation respond to place membership, do not announce at the time of their response that they "have membership." Rather, announce that they "have expressed a desire to be members" of the congregation. At the same time also announce that the elders will meet with them as soon as possible to discuss the congregation's work with them. Ideally, this should be done the same day. In this discussion period, not only should the congregation's work be discussed (as well as the way the new folk might fit into it), but some time should be spent on doctrinal matters with stress on the congregation's determination to follow the Word faithfully. If they bring a letter of commendation, it should be reviewed, and its source carefully weighed (a commendation is only as good as its source!). Also, if those wanting to place membership involve a married couple, due to the prevalence of unauthorized divorce and

remarriage in our society, some discussion should be given to their marital situation. Of course, if the ones wanting to place membership have visited over an extended period so that the elders and others have learned of their faithful convictions and lives and/or if they have a letter from trusted brethren with them, such a process is not necessary. Frankly, some brethren have “trouble” written all over them from the day they first start attending worship; they are not about to submit to the Word of God. How much better to find out who they are **before** they are welcomed with open arms rather than afterward when they have had time to influence others adversely and gain their sympathy!

Although it cannot be positively determined, the text indicates that Phoebe was the bearer of this letter. Paul was apparently at Corinth when he wrote it (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). Phoebe would likely have come through Corinth on her way to Rome. If she carried and delivered the letter, one can but wonder at the responsibility that was hers to handle this priceless treasure of Truth safely until it reached its destination.

#### *Chapter 16:3-16: Greetings to and from Various Brethren*

The succeeding list of greetings which concludes in verse 15 contains the names of many Paul’s acquaintances and a few of his kindred, concerning most of whom we know little more than what he mentions in this context. Before noticing the list in more detail, consider a few summary statements concerning it:

1. Paul knew many the saints in Rome although he had never been there (Rom. 1:13; 15:22-24, 28-29). He alludes to his acquaintance with some of them from other places, but his means and place of acquaintance with most of them is unknown.
2. It appears likely that these had migrated to Rome from other areas of Paul’s work. The large number of them is remarkable and raises a question concerning the reason for the migration. While Paul does not tell us the background, it is interesting to conjecture that perhaps a concentrated effort was being made to saturate this metropolis with the Gospel and that faithful saints from a broad area had responded.
3. Paul gives us a brief glimpse into his own family by naming three who were his “kinsmen.” They were surely more than kindred merely by race, else Prisca and Aquila would have also been thus denominated. Three other “kinsmen” were with him in Corinth as he wrote (Rom. 16:21). We are given more information on Paul’s family in this chapter than in any other New Testament context. Luke tells us that Paul had a sister who had a son, that he was in Jerusalem at the time of Paul’s imprisonment there, and that he likely helped save his life (Acts 23:12-22). Besides these few folk, none of Paul’s family is mentioned (particularly his parents and his wife [if such he ever had]), leaving us to wonder if they may have rejected him when he obeyed the Gospel. Could the loss of those nearest and dearest in the flesh

have been included in the “all things” he sacrificed and counted as refuse in order to gain Christ (Phi. 3:7-8)?

4. Despite the claims of Roman Catholicism that Peter had become a resident of Rome before this letter was written,<sup>11</sup> his presence there is not hinted at in this chapter of greetings. Such would have been an unthinkable insult had Peter been there; the absence of his name from those greeted is the strongest implication that he was not. Furthermore, when Paul later wrote his “prison epistles” from Rome (i.e., Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), Peter is never mentioned, although Paul mentions many who had been or still were with him in his trials. The claim that Peter was ever in Rome rests solely on tradition.
5. The thoughtfulness, gratitude, and tenderness of the apostle are all amply demonstrated in these many greetings and notes of commendation.
6. The brief “snapshots” of history Paul gives us in this chapter are titillating and remind us that we know only a small fraction of the detailed and daily history of the apostolic period. There are so many unrecorded “stories” of the struggles, the toil, the pain, and even the victories that were experienced by the “rank and file” soldiers in the Lord’s army in that era as they carried the message of Truth into a heathen world. We are also reminded that the Holy Spirit did not inspire the human writers of the Bible to write such things as would be most interesting to men or about which men would be most curious. His aim through them was to write “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). We will have an eternity to “swap stories” with those who have gone before!

**Verses 3-5a:** Paul’s first greetings are to one of the most remarkable Christian couples in the New Testament church, here called “Prisca and Aquila” (in other passages, “Priscilla and Aquila”). Paul had met them when he visited Corinth the first time. They had been residents of Rome but being Jews, had fled to Corinth upon Claudius’ eviction of their race (Acts 18:2). We are not told when they obeyed the Gospel, but since their conversion is not mentioned **after** Paul met them, it is likely that they were already Christians **when** Paul met them.

When Paul left Corinth, they went with him as far as Ephesus, where they remained until he made his circuit through Syria and returned (Acts 18:18-21). During Paul’s absence, Apollos came to Ephesus, preaching many things accurately about Christ, but still knowing only John’s baptism. Aquila and Priscilla were spiritually mature and doctrinally strong enough to teach him the Truth on this matter (Acts 18:25-26).<sup>12</sup> Notice that they did not shirk their responsibility by rationalizing that Paul would soon return and could take care of the matter. Neither did they foolishly reason (as most of the present-day world and many present-day disciples do) that such doctrinal issues really do not matter anyway as long as Apollos was sincere and full of “love.”

At the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, Prisca and Aquila were still in Ephesus with him (1 Cor. 16:19). This means they had resided there for longer than three years (Acts 20:31), having preceded Paul there probably by some months (Acts 18:18–21) and apparently remaining there some time after he left. Obviously, the Claudian edict had been lifted by the time of Paul's letter to Rome, allowing them to return to their former home. However, by the time of Paul's second Roman imprisonment they had returned to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19).

To what specific occurrence Paul refers, in which this devout pair risked their necks for his life, we know not. They most likely were witnesses to the Jew-inspired mob action in Corinth in which Paul was dragged before Gallio (Acts 18:12). They were also in Ephesus when the violence provoked by Demetrius threatened Paul's life (Acts 19:23–32). On some occasion or occasions, perhaps one of the above, they hazarded their own lives for his. He expressed not only his own gratitude, but also that of the churches that loved and respected him.

As was the case in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), so in Rome—they opened their house to brethren as a place for the church to meet. There is no hint of any defect in their moral or doctrinal makeup in any passage of Scripture. They are rather depicted consistently as loyal disciples who had not only served as faithful co-workers with Paul, but who had been refined by the fire of trials. The good they did in their varied residences will not be fully known until The Judgment, but we can even now assess it to be extensive. How appropriate it is that Prisca and Aquila appear first on Paul's list of salutations!

**Verses 5b–6:** Epaenetus was well known and greatly loved by Paul. A textual variation prevents our knowing whether he was converted to Christ in Asia (ASV) or in Achaia (KJV). In either case, it would likely have been while Paul, Prisca, and Aquila were together, either in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–10) or earlier in Corinth (18:1–11). Since Epaenetus is mentioned in such close proximity to Prisca and Aquila, some conjecture that they converted him, and he traveled to Rome with them.<sup>13</sup>

Mary (literally, “Marian”) is one of the most frequently appearing names in the New Testament. Robert Taylor points out that each woman bearing this name is of commendable character.<sup>14</sup> Due to another textual variation we do not know whether she bestowed her labors upon the Roman saints (ASV) or upon Paul (KJV). In either case, she was a diligent, hard-working Christian, worthy of commendation.

**Verse 7:** Andronicus and Junias were relatives of Paul, although, as stated above, we do not know the relationship. Paul was imprisoned several times of which we have record (and likely some of which we have none [2 Cor. 6:5; 12:23]). It is impossible to know which imprisonment these men shared with Paul. The important thing to know is that they were willing to so suffer for the Christ and with the apostle. Men and women who **profess** to be loyal to Christ and supportive of those who publicly stand for Him in the peaceful times are “a dime a dozen.” Those who **prove** their loyalty and support when opposition comes and suffering threatens are rare indeed! Paul’s kinfolk named here were of the latter class and serve as an inspiring example for us.

These men were “of note among the apostles.” Amazingly, some would augment the number of the actual apostles by at least these two men based on Paul’s statement here. However, as Shedd emphasizes, Paul uses *among*, not “...in the sense of ‘of,’ or ‘belonging to,’ the apostles..., but honorably known among the apostles.”<sup>15</sup> Andronicus and Junias were so courageous and of such superior Christian maturity that they had distinguished themselves in the eyes of the apostles. This is a marvelous accolade!

Remarkably, these men had become Christians before Paul did. Where or when we do not know, although Moses E. Lard suggests that they may have been among the “sojourners from Rome” on Pentecost (Acts 2:10) who were converted and took the Gospel home with them.<sup>16</sup> The expression, *in Christ*, is never used in the New Testament to refer to any but those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the Gospel of Christ, whereupon they were added to the church of Christ because they had been forgiven of their sins (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38–41, 47; 18:8; 22:16; Rom. 6:3–4; 8:1; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:1–3; et al.). Those who are “in Christ” are simply Christians.

**Verse 8:** Ampliatus was another who was dear to the heart of Paul, but for what specific reasons we are not told. As Paul wrote in the previous verse that his kinsmen were “in Christ,” so also, he wrote of this beloved one as “in the Lord” with the same meaning. We know nothing more of this brother who had endeared himself to Paul.

**Verse 9:** Somewhere unknown to us Urbanus had been with and worked alongside Paul in the Master’s cause. Paul describes him with the same honorable epithet he earlier applied to Prisca and Aquila (v. 3): “fellow-worker.” Urbanus is a Roman name; Stachys, a Greek. Although little is said of the latter, the fact that Paul speaks of him with deep affection indicates a close familiarity between the two under unnamed circumstances.



**Verse 10:** Apelles was “approved in Christ,” indicating that he had suffered trials or ordeals for the sake of the Lord and had remained faithful. One’s loyalty to the Lord and His Truth are not fully discernible or demonstrated until he faces opposition and persecution. If one is true spiritual “gold,” he will stand the test (and be stronger for it), but if he is of counterfeit or inferior materials, the refining fire will destroy him.

It has puzzled some that Paul did not greet Aristobulus himself but his household or family. Any of several factors may account for this omission, such as his absence from Rome, his having died, or his not being a Christian but having a household (including slaves) who wore his family name. Herod the Great had a grandson named “Aristobulus,” but the suggestion that he and the one mentioned by Paul were the same seems farfetched.

**Verse 11:** Herodian is now mentioned as another “kinsman” of Paul with no other information concerning him. After the manner of the greeting concerning Aristobulus’ household, Paul now greets the “household of Narcissus.” The possible explanations for the previous mode of address apply in this case, also. However, Paul sends his greetings to those in this household who are “in the Lord” (i.e., saints), implying that some were not.

**Verse 12:** Tryphaena and Tryphosa are generally considered to be sisters, perhaps twins. Paul speaks of them as presently doing hard work in the Lord’s service. Persis, another lady, was known well enough by Paul to be called “beloved.” Paul speaks of her labors in the past tense, rather than in the present, as he did in the greeting above. The change of tense may indicate that he had some specific work in mind that she had done or that she had become ill or enfeebled by age and was no longer able to work as before.

**Verse 13:** Rufus is mentioned once elsewhere in the New Testament: He and Alexander were the sons of Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled by the Roman soldiers to bear the cross of our Lord on the way to Golgotha (Mark 15:21). There is no compelling reason not to identify these two passages as references to the same man. He was “chosen in the Lord,” but, as Shedd observed, “...not in the sense applicable to all believers, but in the sense of ‘excellent,’ ‘choice.’”<sup>17</sup> He was a choice, excellent man in the kingdom.

Rufus’ mother was with him in Rome. If he was the son of Simon, then his mother was (or had been) Simon’s wife. The fact that Simon is not named or greeted likely indicates that she was a widow. She is described as “his mother and mine.” None give serious thought to the idea that Paul was speaking literally, which would make Rufus his fleshly brother. Rufus’ mother had doubtless extended the affection, care, and kindness of a mother to him. It is possible that

she did this in an effort to replace that of his own mother, which may have been forfeited upon his conversion (see discussion above on v. 3). Paul obviously looked upon this lady with great affection, respect, and honor.

**Verses 14–15:** The ten men named in these verses have no description of labors or terms of endearment attached to their names. This may indicate that they were either not so highly distinguished or that Paul was not as well acquainted with them as with those named earlier. The two groups of five had some respective work or association in common. It may have been that each of the five lived in the same area and were members of the same congregation meeting in the house of one of them.

**Verse 16a:** After the instructions of the several preceding verses that they were to greet others, in this verse Paul tells them what sort of greeting to employ: “a holy kiss.” We are not to understand Paul to be commanding them to begin using a kiss as a new mode of greeting. As is generally known, this was (and still is) the ordinary mode of greeting in the Middle eastern world, even as the shaking of right hands is in the West. Paul’s purpose here (as in the numerous other places where the kiss-greeting is mentioned in the New Testament [viz., 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 The. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14]), is to regulate the motive and character of the kiss. The emphasis is: **holy** kiss.

Howard Winters identifies several kisses mentioned in the Bible that are always unholy: “(1) the idolatrous kiss (Hosea 13:2); (2) the deceitful kiss (Pro. 27:6 [cf. 2 Sam. 20:9–10, DM]); (3) the betrayal kiss (Luke. 22:48; Mat. 26:48; Mark 14:44).”<sup>18</sup> He also adds the passionate kiss (S. Sol. 1:2), observing that it can be either unholy or holy, depending on circumstance. By commanding them to use a “holy” kiss in their greetings, Paul was warning them against allowing deception, lust, or any other unholy motive to prompt or characterize their kisses of salutation.

Contrary to what some would have us believe, Paul is not binding the mere cultural norm of that place and time for exchanging greetings (namely, the kiss) upon others of different places and times. Rather, what Paul binds here is that our greetings, whatever form they may take, are to be holy.

**Verse 16b:** After Paul sent his personal salutations to numerous individuals in the Roman church, he now sends a general greeting from several congregations: “All the churches of Christ salute you.” Likely he has in mind primarily the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, among which he had been traveling to collect the contribution for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom.

15:26). This greeting indicates that it was known generally among the churches that Paul was writing to the Roman saints. It also indicates that the reputation of the church in Rome was known among the churches generally (cf. 1:8; 16:19).

The observation of McGarvey and Pendleton on the salutations from the churches is well taken:

These salutations indicate that the apostle talked much about his letter before he wrote it. Possibly he was drafting it as he journeyed. And it also shows that the church at the great metropolis, the center of government and civilization, was an object of interest and esteem to all.<sup>19</sup>

*Churches of Christ* connotes the churches of which Christ is the source and/or the owner. While it is not Paul's purpose to make this an official "name" for the church, it is certainly one of several appropriate designative and descriptive terms that can be used for it. Even if Paul had not thus referred to the churches, it would be Scriptural and true to do so on the following basis: Christ promised, "I will build my church" (Mat. 16:18; cf. Acts 20:28, ASV); He did so, and it is therefore certainly correct to call it the "church of Christ."

Other New Testament designations by which the church is called are: (1) "the church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:5, 15; et al.); (2) "the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28, ASV); and (3) "the church of the firstborn."<sup>20</sup> It is also referred to by various figurative designations, such as: (1) the "kingdom" of Christ (Mat. 16:19; John 18:36; Col. 1:13; et al.); (2) the "body" of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; et al.); (3) the "house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15); and (4) the "bride" of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 21:9; 22:17). The most frequently used designation for the church in the New Testament is just that — *the church*. There was only one church envisioned and established by Christ (Mat. 16:18). He purchased only one with His blood (Acts 20:28), and He loved and gave Himself up for none other (Eph. 5:25). No other designation than *the church* was needed to identify it in the first century — there were no denominational counterfeits. To speak of "the church" was quite sufficient to distinguish it from paganism and Judaism, the only alternative religions in the apostolic era. The Lord sternly warned that every other religious institution and organization would be uprooted (Mat. 15:13).

In Matthew 16:18 we see an illustration of the **general** or **universal** use of the word *church*. In other words, in His promise to build the church the Lord had in mind His church as a whole — all of those who would obey Him and be added to it (Acts 2:38-41, 47) in whatever time or place they might live. The following things (among others) are set forth in the New Testament concerning the church in this aggregate, universal sense:

1. Christ is its head (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:24)
2. He is its Savior (Eph. 5:23)
3. It is His spiritual “body” (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).
4. It demonstrates the wisdom of God and is according to His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11)
5. Christ loved it and gave Himself up for it (Eph. 5:25)
6. It is the “general assembly” of those who are “firstborn,” that is, those who are spiritually born again, thereby entering the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5)
7. It is the kingdom of Christ and of God on earth, the establishment of which Satan could not prevent (Mat. 16:19), over which Christ Jesus presently reigns (Mark 16:19; Luke 22:29-30; John 18:36; Acts 2:34-35; Eph. 1:20-23; et al.), which “cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28), and which Christ will deliver up to the Father at His coming (1 Cor. 15:24)

If one has in mind more than one congregation of the Lord’s church (as Paul does in Rom. 16:16), the fitting term is “churches of Christ.” This passage illustrates the use of the word *church* in reference to **specific, localized** congregations, which make up the church as a whole. The New Testament is rife with allusions to various specific congregations (Acts 11:22; 13:1; 20:17; Rom. 16:1, 4-5; Col. 4:16; et al.). It was from such local units of the universal church that Paul sent greetings to the church in Rome.

The “church universal” was/is not made up of the plethora of denominations that falsely claim to be parts of it. They are no part whatsoever! Jesus did not include denominationalism with its pluralistic, variegated confusion of doctrines, names, and practices when He promised to build His church. This abominable concept is a Satan-inspired, man-made aberration that was born of a rejection of Divine authority and introduced some fifteen centuries too late to be any part of the Lord’s church. There was and is only one Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), which produces only the religion of Christ (Eph. 4:3-6). There was and is only one spiritual seed, the Word of Christ (Luke 8:11), which produces only one plant—the kingdom or church of Christ (Gal. 6:7; Mat. 15:13). When only the Gospel is preached, believed, and obeyed, it produces only members of the church of Christ (and thus the church of Christ itself). Baptist doctrine produces the Baptist Church, and so it is with the Methodist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, and any and every other sect or cult in existence.

The foregoing principle is so basic and simple that one with even a smattering of Biblical knowledge must have ample assistance to miss it. Yet millions of Bible readers outside the church have never seen it. However, sad beyond words is the fact that a segment has arisen within the church in recent years, which denies—not ignorantly, but in spite of their knowledge of it—this incontrovertible precept. They are ashamed of the plea that invites all men to take the

Bible as the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God and to teach and practice only what it authorizes. They ridicule even the possibility, much less the necessity, of restoring the New Testament church. They applaud their denominational chums as spiritual heroes and have so little decency and reverence for the Truth as to confuse the religious whoredom of denominationalism with the chaste bride of Christ. All the while, they can only speak of the church of the living God with dripping sarcasm and heaps of ridicule.

Ashamed of the beautiful, Scriptural designation, “church of Christ,” some of them are at last removing the despised words from the signs on their buildings. (Some of us have for years been encouraging them to do this very thing – the sooner the better!) As long as these liberal churches (and the schools that support them) even pretend to be a part of the body of Christ, they are shysters who are “flying under false colors.”

We cannot admire (and certainly do not rejoice over) anyone who abandons the Christ. However, we can at least admire the honesty of those who, refusing to abide any longer in His doctrine, have made a “clean break” in order to start their own sects (or have joined those they have so lavishly praised). Randy Mayeux, Don Finto, Wesley Reagan, Jim Bevis, Kip McKean, and several others have done the “manly” thing in recent years – they have dived headlong into the religious cesspool of sectarianism without so much as holding their noses! These are far more honorable than that large cadre who, having long ago deserted the Christ Who died for them and the church which He bought with His blood, brazenly and boastfully declare their intent to stay among us till, if possible, they have corrupted the last little lamb of the smallest flock.

With inexpressible sadness, yet with firmness, our message and challenge to all of these who are ashamed of and who despise the church of Christ is: **It is time – past time – for you to go!** The truth is that they long ago “went out from us” in their hearts and convictions because “they were not of us” (1 John 2:19).

Religious “fifth columnists,” guilty of the high crimes of spiritual insurrection and treason against the Heavenly kingdom, were not unfamiliar to Paul. His very next words pertain to a description of them, warnings about them, and instructions on the proper way to deal with them.

### *Chapter 16:17-20: A Plea for Doctrinal Purity*

**Verse 17:** Having sent greetings to the faithful in Rome, calling many of them by name, Paul now issues a warning about those who were not commendable and not worthy of acceptance or salutation. Stronger and plainer words on the necessity of maintaining doctrinal purity cannot be found in or out of the New Testament than these with which Paul begins his final plea of the epistle. Paul says, "I beseech you," which translates *parakalo*. The term is a compound of *para*, alongside of or beside, and *kaleo*, to call, thus to call one alongside of oneself. It is a strong term of appealing, urging, exhorting, and encouraging to a given action. Although Paul as an apostle could have **commanded** what he writes here, he issues a strong, imploring **appeal** instead. The exhortation nonetheless has the strength of a charge, order, or command. This is not merely a polite suggestion; it is an earnest entreaty undergirded by apostolic authority!

The substance of the appeal is that the true doctrine of Christ that they had learned must be carefully guarded and preserved. The principal means by which this was to be done were two: (1) "Mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the doctrine" and (2) "turn away from them." There was never a more devilish philosophy than that which teaches that spiritual Truth is unimportant or nonexistent and that doctrinal purity is inconsequential. None can read the New Testament with unbiased eyes and escape the constant emphasis upon it. This emphasis begins with such representative statements of our Lord as: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21); "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples" (John 8:31); and "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). This accentuation does not end until almost the final words of the final book which sternly warn men neither to add to nor subtract from the revealed Word (Rev. 22:18-19). **No New Testament author neglects this emphasis!**

The motive of this strong and consistent theme rests in the irrefragable fact that the Word of God through Christ is God's spiritual seed. If the seed is faithfully preserved and planted, its germination can do naught but produce the plant that is imprinted by God on its spiritual genes. Moreover, the spiritual plant which it produces, the church of Christ, can remain pure, heal-thy, and strong only so long as it feeds upon the pure doctrine of the Gospel. **Apostasy cannot even be defined apart from doctrinal corruption.** When one or a

hundred saints move away from Christ, the reason is that they have embraced a different “gospel” — a perverted one (Gal. 1:6-7). The reason that any congregation is different in its worship, organization, name, direction, or any other particular from what is prescribed in the New Testament is that the message — the doctrine it follows — is different from that of the New Testament. The two — the doctrine and the church — are inseparably linked. When the doctrine is changed, a vicious cycle, all but impossible to interrupt, is set in motion. The change of doctrine creates changes in the church; the more the church changes, the more the doctrine is despised, causing yet further digressions by the church, and on and on it goes.

For this reason, the inspired men were so boldly militant in their preservation of inspired Truth. As they did, so must we contend earnestly for the faith, be always ready to give answer for our hope, and be set for the defense of the Gospel (Jude 3; 1 Pet. 3:15; Phi. 1:16). This is precisely why Paul wrote this magnificent appeal to conclude his letter to Rome. **No better illustration of what happens when men ignore this appeal can be found than the development of the totally apostate Roman Catholic Church, which began as the church of Christ in Rome to whom Paul wrote this letter.**

False doctrine does not exist independently of false teachers. Therefore, the originators and propagators of the divisive doctrines must be dealt with. They are to be “marked,” which is from *skopein*, meaning to “look (out) for, notice, keep one’s eyes on someone or something.”<sup>21</sup> There must be vigilance in every saint for the false teacher. How strange that anyone who professes loyalty to Christ and respect for New Testament doctrine and example would be nonchalant toward, much less sympathize with, purveyors of perverted prattle. But alas, the only way some “look out for” the teacher of contrary doctrines is to supply his needs, defend him, and protect him!

Paul is demanding of us the practice of discrimination concerning teachers and teaching. Quite pitifully some (including many elders) are so ignorant of the Truth they are incapable of recognizing error when they hear or see it. Others count it a mark of spiritual superiority never to “keep books” or “files” on any brother. In some sort of warped benevolence, they can hear the most blatant error and heresy spewed forth by a false teacher of some eminence and either be totally oblivious to it or immediately excuse it, deny it, or forget it — or all four! The man who places his hand over his car’s fuel gauge, thinking it will cause his fuel to last indefinitely if he does not see it register “empty,” is a fool. Those who boast of not knowing or remembering who the advocates of heresy and promoters of apostasy are, pretending that such do not exist if they

do not know of them, are likewise living in La-La Land. Several years of ignoring the errors of the workers of evil instead of taking note of them has produced the predictable evil fruit of disobeying Divine instruction on a broad scale.

It has been argued that the idea of “branding” is not in the word translated “mark,” but that it merely means “to look at,” “to look at critically,” “to take notice of.”<sup>22</sup> The aim of the arguer is to discourage what he perceives to be unwarranted branding and labeling of others:

We have men who apparently feel their chief mission in life is the branding in the eyes of the whole church all those who differ with them. We have a type of journalism whose chief function seems to be to attack the reputation of those who differ with the views of the editors and writers for those journals.<sup>23</sup>

(Did this writer perchance forget his subject so as to brand and label those whom he judges to be guilty of branding and labeling – and by means of journalism at that?)

The definition of this single word of the text is not contested. But what is the point of taking note of and keeping one’s eyes on false teachers so as to be able to avoid them and to warn others of them unless we brand, label, and expose them for what they are? Was not this our Lord’s practice (Mat. 7:6, 15–16; 16: 6; et al.)? Assuredly, this was both the precept and practice of Paul (Phi. 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:3, 20; 2 Tim. 2: 16–17; 4:1–4; Tit. 1:9–13, et al.). If Paul did not give this charge to the end that divisive teachers might be identified and exposed **so that they might be avoided and their influence nullified**, then the charge is so much useless verbiage. Strangely, the author of the article under discussion did not mention Paul’s mandate in 2 Thessalonians 3:14: “And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed.” This order is unquestionably parallel to that of Romans 16:17. Paul’s leading charge to the Thessalonians is “note that man.” The word *note* is from a Greek word which means “to mark, in-scribe marks upon,”<sup>24</sup> “to mark, to take special notice of someone,”<sup>25</sup> “to mark, note, distinguish by marking... to mark or note for oneself.”<sup>26</sup> The task of marking and labeling apostates is certainly authorized, yea necessitated by this passage.

We must never engage in, endorse, or encourage reckless defamation or hasty accusation of others. Our identity of false teachers must not be based upon guesses or hunches, but upon their doctrines and practices. However, given the proof of their error, we must boldly mark, brand, label, identify, and expose the herald of damnable doctrine. If the exposure and confrontation of the sinister apostates that have arisen in the church in the past thirty-five years



had been left up to those of the attitude expressed in the quotation above, the battle with digressives would have long ago been lost.

Not only are these teachers to be taken note of, but also, they are to be turned away from, avoided (cf. Tit. 3:10; 2 John 10–11). That is, they are not to be listened to or extended any sort of treatment that implies endorsement. We are to withdraw our-selves from and have no company with them because they are disorderly (2 The. 3:6,14; 2 John 9:11; cf. Mat. 7:15–16; 1 Cor. 5: 9–13; Eph. 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:3–4, 19–20; 2 Tim. 2:16–18; Tit. 1:10–13; 3:10–11). The axiom, *Men are known by the company they keep*, applies to preachers, congregations, and colleges. If so many preachers, elderships, school trustees, and college administrators had not been so reluctant to obey Romans 16:17 over the past several years in their misplaced “bleeding-heart” tolerance, the digressive element that so ominously threatens the peace and purity of the body of Christ could have long ago been isolated and rendered all but impotent. For lack of backbone to expose and turn away from evil men, many of them are now firmly entrenched in places of great influence and are not unlike a raging carcinoma devouring the body of Christ.

This passage emphasizes the dependence of true unity upon doctrinal unanimity. Where doctrines that differ from and are contrary to **the doctrine** are taught and received, the result is not unity, but “divisions and occasions of stumbling.” The suggestion that **Scriptural** unity is possible on any basis other than adherence to doctrinal Truth is absurd. This is not to say that other things (e.g., selfishness, jealousy, politics, human loyalties, etc.) are not sometimes the cause of division. We simply emphasize the point here that Heaven-ordained unity cannot prevail in the climate of doctrinal diversity. The averment that “It is not doctrine that unites us, it is love” is not only **un**-scriptural, but also utterly **anti**-Scriptural.

Scriptural unity surely involves mutual love between the parties concerned, but it requires far more than mere emotion and sentiment. The content of Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside–Garrett–Money doctrine of *unity in diversity*. The case is overwhelming when one considers many other passages from the Lord and His inspired men (John 17:20–21; Acts 2:42; Rom. 15:5–6; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1–6; Phi. 3:16; et al.). This teaching is too plain for ordinary readers to miss, much less for those with PhDs. They have not missed it. They have read it; they know it is there. **They have despised and then deliberately rejected the doctrine.** The very words, *Scriptural unity in doctrinal diversity*, are contradictory and absurd — a sublime oxymoron.

In the face of divisive, destructive doctrines that are contrary to “the doctrine” many yet cry for patience and tolerance toward teachers of the same. Just how long can false teachers be allowed to rape and ravish the bride of Christ? How long must we wait to apply Paul’s order in Romans 16:17 to those who are openly propagating divisive and contrary doctrines on a multitude of subjects? Such men already dominate hundreds of congregations, and many others are as meek lambs just waiting to be slaughtered. If the influences of these men on the present generation are a tragedy, we fear to contemplate what the next generation will bring.

Are these men and their doctrines causing “divisions and occasions of stumbling” as Paul predicted? Most certainly! Both at home and abroad they have done and are doing their dastardly work. I have personally seen the results of their ruthless efforts among brethren in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, The Philippines, and Jamaica. Additionally, I have received heartbreaking reports of grievous problems in Ghana, Russia, South Africa, Great Britain, and other nations. If now is not the time for faithful brethren to stand up and say, “We have taken note of these false teachers and their divisive doctrines, we are labeling them for what they are, and we must turn away from them,” then when will be the time? How many more young preachers and uninformed elders will they be allowed to suck into their vortex? How many more churches must be divided, and how many more souls lost before we draw the line and say, “This far and no farther?” How long can the usually commendable trait of longsuffering be extended before it becomes a vice instead of a virtue?

As sad as the prospect is and as difficult as is the performance (especially concerning those who have been dear friends and respected comrades in the past), can we any longer resist the Holy Spirit’s instruction? Let us take Paul’s charge seriously. If we do, so we will:

1. Warn others about them and their doctrines
2. Refuse to endorse, encourage, or have fellowship with them in any way, realizing that to do so is to be guilty of their religious crimes (2 John 9–11)
3. Do nothing to give them credence, refusing even to print one of their articles in a church bulletin (even if the article itself contains no error). If our brotherhood would as one man obey Paul’s order concerning the heretics among us, some of them might even be shocked into repentance. If not, at least their influence would be seriously dulled if not nullified.

**Verse 18:** The subject of this verse is the motive, method, and aim of the false teachers. Their motive is utterly selfish. They only pretend to serve Christ; they really serve “their own belly” — a graphic way of referring to fleshly appetites. This likely means they were seeking a following as a means of generating financial profit and support (cf. Phi. 3:19; Tit. 1:10–11). Many

outside the body of Christ teach error ignorantly, sincerely believing they are teaching the Truth. Some in the church have likely taught fatal error in ignorance. Their sincere desire to please God by teaching the Truth is proved when the error is called to their attention, and they humbly and eagerly correct it.

However, the class of false teachers that is spearheading the current digression are not victims of ignorance. For the most part they “grew up in the church” under sound teachers and for several years understood, preached, taught, and defended the faith. Many (if not most) have advanced degrees, so lack of intelligence is not their problem. These have made shipwreck of the faith **with their eyes wide open**. Their problem is not ignorance, but **arrogance**. They have an elitist attitude that is above and beyond correction by any of us mere mortals who still know, love, and preach the whole counsel of God. Whether the motive of these men is financial reward (some of the most notoriously liberal preachers reportedly receive extraordinary salaries), pride, the desire to be free of the moral restraints of the Gospel, or some other, Paul’s description of them is apt: “such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly.”

Their method is hypocrisy. They feign kindness and a sweet disposition (which suddenly evaporates when they are resisted and exposed, or when they gain the upper hand). They ingratiate themselves to all that they can through flattery. Their demeanor in the classroom or pulpit is always gentle, non-judgmental, positive (unless, of course, they begin talking about how despicable the church of Christ has been for so many years and how badly it needs to change!).

They want to appeal to a certain class of people; so they say the things they know those folk want to hear. Jesus described them as “ravening wolves” all dressed up “in sheep’s clothing” (Mat. 7:15). A large portion of brethren wants to hear almost anything besides the Gospel anymore, especially if it is delivered in no more than fifteen-or twenty-minute installments. The modern false teachers, like those of Paul’s time, are quite willing to “scratch” those many ears that “itch” for just such palaver (2 Tim. 4:3–4). They thus substitute oratory, stories, personal testimony, illustrations, personality, drama, and other assorted things for sermons filled with the Sacred Text.

Their duplicity is revealed by their aim. It is not genuine kindness, sweetness, and service rendered to the Christ, but it is all a facade in order to “beguile the hearts of the innocent.” They are religious con men who prey upon naive, gullible, un-informed, and worldly brethren. These men in sleight and craftiness employ the “wiles of error” to deceive those weak

souls who can be “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). When we read these words from Paul, it seems almost as if he were living among us and writing his observations of the behavior of so many who are causing havoc in the church by their heresies. Let us arise and oppose them and reject them. We must do what we can to spare the innocent from their clutches.

**Verse 19:** In their obedience to God, the Romans were innocent of the corruption that would result from the deceptions of false teachers (vv. 17–18). Rather than charging them with being “legalists” for their concern about obedience to God (as many among us today are wont to do), Paul commended them and rejoiced at their obedience. There is simply no way to prove one’s love for the Christ except by obeying Him (John 14:15, 21, 24), even as there is no way to prove one’s faith in the Lord without works of obedience (Jam. 2:18, 20, 24, 26). Not only was Paul aware of the attitude of obedience to God in the Roman church, but also their reputation had spread throughout the brotherhood. Since Rome was the capital of the civilized world, there was constant traffic in and out of it from all areas of the Empire. The fact that Christians thus circulated explains easily how the reputation of the Roman saints became so widespread. Paul’s teaching in the latter half of Romans 16:19 is designed to help them preserve their innocence before and obedience to God. He first encourages them to be wise unto good things, to the Truth and to sound doctrine they had learned. *Wise* is from a Greek word that means quick to discern, alert, aware.<sup>27</sup> He is thus telling them to remain alert, sensitive to, and discerning of the Truth of God’s Word. On the other hand, he wishes them to be “simple” (dull or obtuse, unresponsive to, thus without experience) to the false doctrine and evil practices of the errorists. There are some things we are better off not knowing and experiencing. We do not have to experience sinful behavior (e.g., drinking alcoholic beverages, taking illicit drugs, committing fornication, gambling, smoking, stealing, etc.) to know that it is sinful and destructive. We can learn the danger of such through reading God’s Word and through observation of the lives of those who do such things.

**Verse 20:** In the perpetual battle between God and Satan, God will triumph. If the Romans, in particular, withstood Satan—preventing his servants from dividing the church through false teaching—the God of peace (as opposed to Satan’s pawns who would seek to destroy their peace) would thereby soon deal Satan a crushing blow. Contrary to what some teach, this promise of Paul has no reference whatsoever to the Lord’s Second Coming.

Paul closes the verse with the brief expression of his desire that the Lord's favor remain with them. No greater wish could one entertain for others because one's eternal destiny is determined by whether he receives and remains in God's grace. This brief benediction implies that it is possible for Christians to fall from grace.

#### ***Chapter 16:21-27: Paul's Last Words to the Romans***

**Verse 21:** Having sent his personal greetings to various individuals (vv. 1-15) and having sent greetings from a number of congregations (v. 16), Paul now sends greetings from those who were with him as he wrote. Timothy is so well known as Paul's most trustworthy and trusted fellow-worker that little needs to be said about him. After being introduced in Acts 16, his name appears several times in subsequent chapters of that book in connection with Paul's travels. He is often mentioned in Paul's letters and was the recipient of two such epistles. Paul paid him his highest compliment: "For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your estate.... But ye know the proof of him, that as a child serveth a father, so he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel" (Phi. 2:19-23). Paul honored Timothy by addressing to him two epistles, the latter of which was the last one he wrote so far as we know.

The name Lucius first appears as that belonging to one of the prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1). There is no way of knowing if this is the same man as he who sent greetings through Paul to the Romans. Jason, who also sent greetings to Rome, may be the stalwart brother who opened his home to Paul and his companions in Thessalonica and who was persecuted for doing so (Acts 17:5-7, 9). Sosipater is not mentioned elsewhere, but it is possible that "Sopater of Beroea" (Acts 20:4) is an abbreviated form of the same name. As were the men in Romans 16:7, 11, so were these last three men labeled Paul's "kinsmen." Once more, this is understood to mean that there was some family relationship, rather than the mere racial connection with fellow Hebrews.

**Verse 22:** Paul often used an amanuensis or secretary to write down his letters as he dictated them (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; et al.). Tertius served Paul in this capacity when he wrote the Romans letter. We know nothing more of this brother.

**Verse 23:** Gaius is the name of one of the few brethren whom Paul personally baptized at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14). Although he could have been only visiting at Corinth when he obeyed the Gospel, it is generally conceded that this was his home. There was another Gaius from Macedonia (Philippi or Thessalonica) who was one of Paul's "companions in travel" (Acts 19:29). Yet another Gaius is identified as a resident of Derbe (Acts 20:4). John addressed his

third letter to a man named Gaius, but whether to one of these or to yet another we have no way of knowing (3 John 1). It is generally believed that Paul was in Corinth when he wrote to the Romans and that the Gaius to whom Paul alludes as his host in Romans 16:23 is the one he baptized in Corinth. He was a man of some wealth since he had a house that was large enough to host the church there.

Erastus was a man of some civic prominence, being the “treasurer of the city.” If Paul wrote from Corinth, then it would appear that he was an official of that city. The name *Erastus* appears two other times in the New Testament (Acts 19:22; 2 Tim. 4:20), but it is not possible to certainly identify all of them as the same man. There is no other reference to Quartus in the New Testament. He was likely one of several such brethren who were Paul’s attendants at various times, but of whom we know nothing except that they were brethren in Christ.

**Verse 24:** This verse, a virtual repetition of the latter part of verse 20, is included in the KJV text, but not in the ASV and most later versions. It is not found in some of the ancient MSS. Whether the benediction belongs only as verse 20, only as verse 24, or in both places, its meaning is the same (see comments on v. 20 above).

**Verses 25–27:** It was characteristic of Paul to conclude his letters with a statement of blessing on his addressees that sometimes included an outpouring of praise to God and His Son (cf. 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:23–24; Phi. 4:23; Col. 4:18; et al.). Similar statements are found in Ephesians 3: 14–21 and Hebrews 13:20–21, although neither of these constitutes the closing words of these epistles. James Denney observes that in these verses “...all the leading ideas of the Epistle to the Romans may be discovered....”<sup>28</sup>

Paul sets forth the following concepts in his doxology:

1. God, not ourselves or other men, is our source of strength. No Christian is strong except in the power of God.
2. This steadfastness is in regard to the Gospel Paul preached. The means by which God renders us steadfast and stable is through our submission to the Gospel.
3. The Gospel consists of preaching Christ (not the preaching which Christ did). Philip preached “Jesus” to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:35), and Paul preached “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:2; cf. 2 Cor. 4:5).
4. The Gospel, God’s good news of redemption through His Son (especially as Paul expounded upon it in the Romans epistle), was a mystery that intrigued the prophets of old and even the angels (1 Pet. 1:9–12). Even by wise men and rulers could not know it without God’s revelation of it (1 Cor. 2:6–10, 13). *Mystery* was one of Paul’s favorite terms for referring to the Gospel (Eph. 1:9; 3:3–4, 9; 6:19; Col. 1:26–27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 The. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16). This term does

not necessarily imply that which is difficult to comprehend once it is revealed. Of course, it was impossible to know or comprehend until God revealed it through His inspired men. The Lord employed the term in explaining to the apostles why He was teaching them in parables: "Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11).

5. The mystery of God's plan for the redemption of mankind through His Son was conceived in eternity past and held in silence till the proper moment in God's ultimate wisdom. Christ is described as the perfect Lamb of redemption "...Who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:18-20). God's plan to save us and call us to Himself is not according to our works, but rather according to His "...own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal" (2 Tim. 1:9). The church, at the very center of that mystery, is "...according to the eternal purpose which he [God, DM] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:8-11). God's people were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).
6. That plan, so long shrouded in mystery, was revealed, and manifested through the Scriptures. At God's decree and according to His infinite wisdom, "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4). He came preaching that He would fulfill the law and the prophets (Mat. 5:17-18) and that the Scriptures bore witness of Him (John 5:39; cf. Luke 24:44). The Old Testament types and prophecies contained the essential information concerning the Christ, but only for those to whom God had revealed their meaning by inspiration. For this reason, Paul resorted constantly to the Old Testament to certify his preaching of Jesus. After all, Christ was the "end of the law" to every believer (Rom. 10:4). When the Old Testament was read and interpreted in reference to the Christ, He could be seen as the aim and emphasis of all of it.
7. God commanded through the Christ that the revealed mystery, the Gospel, was and is to be made known unto all the nations. This simply refers to the commission God gave the apostles and, through them, to us "even unto the end of the world." The Gospel is to be taken by the Lord's people to every accountable person in every nation in all the world (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47).
8. The purpose of broadcasting the Gospel message is that men might believe it, obey it, and be saved. A faith short of obedience is dead and avails nothing (Jam. 2:20, 26). "Unto obedience of faith" is essentially the same statement Paul made at the beginning of the letter. There Paul wrote of Christ "...through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake" (Rom. 1:6). In both of these passages (Rom. 1:6; 16:26) the ASV has a footnote on the phrase *of faith*, which reads: "Or, 'to the faith.'" If the footnote is correct, Paul was referring to the Gospel as "the faith" which must be obeyed (cf. Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 4:1; Jude 3; et al.). In either case there is unarguable emphasis on the fact that men must obey the Word of Christ to be saved. Men who contend that Paul teaches salvation by mere intellectual faith alone must put their blinders on when they read Romans 1:6 and 16:26!
9. God is characterized as wise here in light of His being the One who originated and knew the plan of redemption which was such a mystery to man. He was the only One who could reveal it and order its announcement.

10. Paul concludes by ascribing unending glory either to God or to Christ, which case cannot be ascertained for sure. However, since the doxology throughout has been in praise of God, perhaps it is best to so understand this last statement. It is through Jesus the Christ that God is to be glorified forever, which fact itself is an ascription of glory to the Christ as well.

### Conclusion

Men seem incapable of learning the most obvious lessons of history or Scripture. The church in Rome, with all of those named and likely many other unnamed members, remained the church of Christ so long and only so long as she faithfully preached and practiced apostolic doctrine. When the mood of compromise, softness, and tolerance of false doctrines and those who taught them began to prevail, it took only a few generations for the church to lose its identity. With the passing of the centuries, it evolved into the Roman Catholic Church.

The same sort of thing is happening in our time in many congregations of the Lord's church. Some of them are in about the same doctrinal mood and position on the road to utter apostasy as those which produced the Christian Church denomination about a century ago. Many congregations are ripe for the introduction of mechanical musical instruments into worship or a host of other innovations. There are many within Zion's walls (at least bodily) who are boldly advocating and introducing un-authorized changes with as much speed as possible. Their aim is to destroy the church of Christ and build their own human religious society in its place. Let us review, remember, and reemphasize the necessity of marking and avoiding those who would do so.

### Endnotes

1. Some portions of the material in this chapter have appeared in slightly different form in *The Book of Romans*, ed. Garland Elkins, Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1983), pp. 236-246, and in *The Epistles of I and II Timothy, Titus*, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1986), pp. 109-110.
2. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
3. Among those affirming an official role of deaconess for Phoebe are: Moses E. Lard, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.), pp. 451-452; Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), pp. 332-333; A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1931), 4:425; Spence and Exell, *ibid.*; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956). p. 257.
4. The ASV has a footnote on the word *servant*: "or deaconess."
5. James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on I and 2 Thessalonians, I and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. Co., 1978), p. 183.
6. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary – Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 132.
7. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 207.



8. Robertson L. Whiteside, *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome* (Denton, TX: Inys Whiteside, 1955), p. 293.
9. David Lipscomb and J.W. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1956), 1:271.
10. A.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, et al., *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), 18:454.
11. Joseph McSorley, *An Outline of the Church By Centuries* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Co., 1949), p. 15.
12. As strange as it may seem, some brethren now deny that Priscilla had any part whatsoever in teaching Apollos, although Luke plainly says: "But when **Priscilla and Aquila** heard him, **they...expounded unto him the way of God more accurately**" (Acts 9:26; emp. DM). Likely no one would ever have done so except in an attempt to remain consistent with an untenable position relating to that which a woman may say or do in the presence of men in the worship of God or the communication of His Word (e.g., orally translate the message being preached to one or more males in the worship assembly).
13. R. C. H. Lenski, as quoted by Coffman, *ibid.*, p. 514.
14. Robert R. Taylor, Jr., *Studies in Romans* (Abilene, TX: Quality Pub., 1996), pp. 285–286.
15. William G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, orig. 1879, rep. 1980), pp. 426–427.
16. Moses E. Lard, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans* (Des Moines, IA: Eugene S. Smith, 1914), p. 456.
17. Shedd, p. 428.
18. Howard Winters, *Commentary on Romans: Practical and Explanatory* (Greenville, SC: Carolina Christian, 1985), pp. 187–188.
19. J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans* (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Pub. Co., 1916), p. 549.
20. "Church of the firstborn" is often carelessly read as a reference to the Christ, as if it were parallel to "church of Christ." This is a misunderstanding of the phrase, and to so use it is a misapplication of the passage. "Firstborn" is a plural noun in the Greek and thus cannot refer to the Lord. However, one does not have to know anything about the Greek language to understand this to be so. It is perfectly clear in the English rendering. The verb that immediately follows the noun and its pronoun (i.e., "firstborn who") is plural (i.e., "**are** enrolled in heaven" [emp. DM]), which demands a plural noun for grammatical agreement. Thus, the plural noun "firstborn" cannot refer to the Christ. Obviously, the New Testament teaches in many passages (e.g., Mat. 16:16) that the church is "of" Christ, but this is not the teaching of Hebrews 12:23.
21. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1957), p. 764.
22. Jack P. Lewis, "Mark Them Which Cause Divisions," *Firm Foundation*, Feb. 22, 1983, 6.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), pp. 365–366.
25. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Co., n.d.), p. 574.
26. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, p. 756.
27. Shedd, p. 432.
28. James Denney, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980 rep.), 2:723.

[**NOTE:** I wrote this MS for the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Denton Lectures, hosted by the Pearl St. Church of Christ, Denton, TX, November 10–14, 1996. It was published in the book, *Studies in Romans*, and I delivered a digest of it orally. I directed the lectureship, edited the book of the lectures, and published the book through my publishing company, Valid Pub., Inc.]

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