

Strengthening the Bond of Grace

February 17, 2013

Romans 16:1-24

Dr. David Harrell

I wish to thank our musicians for their hard work, their faithfulness in helping prepare our hearts for the study of the word of God.

This morning we are in Romans chapter 16. We will be looking at the first 24 verses, quite a bit to bite of at one time, but it actually flows rather quickly. In fact we are coming to end of our study in Romans one more discourse after today and it will be complete. So turn to Romans 16.

This is a loving salutation by the Apostle Paul. It is one that is seldom preached, in fact it is one that probably very few of you have ever studied in any great detail and meditated upon. But since we know that all scripture is inspired by God. That all scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, we can therefore conclude that this text is no different, that it has some great instructions for us.

It certainly reveals the tender and affectionate nature of the apostle Paul. He was not an uncaring, arrogant, unapproachable, non-relational type of a man as is often the case with Christian celebrity preacher types and is certainly the case with artists having been around them a great deal over the years. But he was a Christian gentleman, he was courteous, he was kind, gentle of speech, he was tender as we will see he is compassionate. He is fully aware of the grace that he has received and therefore we want to give that to others as well. A living example of Christ like humility and love. In fact, you might say, he practiced what he preached in 1 Corinthians 13, that great love chapter in which he concluded by saying: "But now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love."

Having concluded his epistle filled with profound doctrine and very forthright admonitions, he now opens his arms, so to speak, to these saints in Rome, he gathers his spiritual children together, some of them he knew, most of them he didn't but they were beloved brothers and sisters in Christ and he gives them shall we say a verbal embrace of love.

If you think about, the apostle Paul had been on many journeys, he had met thousands of people and I marvel that now he comes to the end of this epistle at this stage in his life and he can remember so many names and things about these people. This demonstrates sincerity of devotion and concern for others to whom he served and with he served. We should all love one another to such a degree that we carry their names close to our hearts. He truly loved Christ, he loved those who belonged to Christ, they were his spiritual family and here we see what I would call the *strengthening of the bond of grace* that has been sealed by the Master in all of our lives.

I wish to draw your attention to three characteristics of the apostle's heart that emerged from this salutation.

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1. His loving indebtedness for a sister in Christ.

We're going to discover his profound love for not only this lady, but others and I might add the profound role of Godly women in the church.

2. His affection for fellow saints and servants.

We are going to glean insight into how the providence of God orchestrates various aspects of history, especially in the early church.

3. His passion to protect the church from false teachers.

These are inspired instructions that I fear often go neglected to the detriment of the church.

So, let's transport our minds back to the first century. Can you do that in your imagination? Imagine being one of Paul's traveling companions; you're with him right now. Maybe you're seeing Timothy setting over here and you're seeing Tertius who was his secretary who was taking his dictation writing this letter. You're with him now and some others. You're in Corinth, this is at the close of his third missionary journey and you have witnessed the apostle Paul over a number of years preaching and teaching to thousands of people. You've seen him weep, you've seen him be persecuted, you're aware of his own testimony of suffering. In 2 Corinthians 11 where he says, he's been,

"beaten times without number often in danger of death, five times I receive from the Jews 39 lashes, 3 times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst often without food, in cold and exposure."

And yet in spite all of this he is able to dictate this letter and remember specific names of 28 individuals; 17 men; 9 women; 2 couples and 2 households. In his mind we can tell there are the names of many others within those households. My friend this speaks volumes of the apostles love for the saints, both Jew and Gentile.

So he begins his salutation by revealing:

1. His loving indebtedness for his sister in Christ, Phoebe.

Notice 16:1: "I commend you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea." Now, Cenchrea was a neighboring port city of Corinth from which Paul along with Priscilla and Aquila, according to Acts 18:18 "put out to sea," and this would have been at the end of his first ministry there in Corinth. Phoebe's name means "bright and radiant", a name derived from the bright and radiant moon goddess, Artemis, also identified with the Roman goddess, Diana. So she would have probably been a Gentile

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convert. But some Jews gave their children Greek names as well, so we can't be dogmatic. We know that she was a member of the church in Cenchrea and also fellowshiped with the saints in the Corinth. As we see here, Phoebe had the esteemed privilege of transporting the epistle, this particular epistle to the saints in Rome. We have reason to believe as I will explain later, that she was a wealthy, single businesswoman accustomed to extensive travel, able to afford having an entourage and going long distances.

So Paul commends her to them as his "sister" in Christ and as a, notice, "servant." Diakonos in the original language from which we get the term "deacon". The term is what we call neuter, it's not gender specific. Diakonos has no feminine form, so this merely describes a servant.

As a footnote this was before the offices of deacon and deaconesses were introduced to the church. The specific qualifications for a deaconess which was nothing more than a woman servant in the church, with no position of authority, is found in 1 Timothy 3:11: "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." I might add that this does not refer to the wives of deacons, as some erroneously teach. Since Paul gives no specific qualifications for the wives of elders, there's no reason for us to assume he would do so for deacons.

The primary role of a women servant, of a diakonos, in the early church was to care for the sick, needy, imprisoned members of that church and there were many in those days. Also care for strangers that came their way. Because of the rigid segregation that was typical in the Greek culture we would believe that the women, primarily, and we see this throughout the New Testament, a primarily ministered to other females within the church. They would help with baptisms, they would certainly disciple other women, that was a key role of the women and they would help and instruct and care for children and so forth as our women do here.

The testimony of scripture reveals that both men and women were devoted to the church, not to the community. There is an important distinction here. I want you to notice it says, Phoebe: "who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea." This implies a position of responsibility at the church. She works within the church. This is a biblical mandate for all of us. We are to serve in our local church, that's the priority. Not to say that we can't serve some in the community, but too often we get distracted with serving our communities and then end up neglecting the myriad of needs that we have within our church.

Sometimes you hear the phrase, "Community outreach," we need to be more about community outreach. I don't buy that for a second. It's often defined in our culture as things like, being involved with rescue missions, food pantries, and clothes pantries, and car clubs, and doing concerts for the community, and community projects for the poor

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and all of those types of things. Many churches will spend thousands of dollars and many man hours on what? What's the payoff for that? Ultimately that is not the biblical mandate; that is not the type of ministry that we see being done in the early church. For the most part, it is a colossal waste of time and resources. Very few people ever come to Christ through those kinds of things. New Testament churches were never commended for their work in the community. Take for example 2 Thessalonians 1, we see that they were commended for their faith being greatly enlarged for their love of each one toward one another growing greater and greater, for their perseverance and faith amidst persecutions. In chapter 3, they were commended because: "the word of the Lord is spreading rapidly because of their obedience to the apostolic commands, etc.

Very often churches can become so consumed with what they would call community outreach to the neglect of the needs within the body, that they would turn their church into a community center. They end up catering to the physical needs of the community rather than the spiritual needs. Their services end up being events that entertain rather, than worship services that equip and edify and encourage the saints to do the work of the ministry. Very often I've seen churches that are strong in community outreach are weak in preaching the true gospel, yet they're weak in doing the one-anotherings that we are called to do.

Jesus said we are to make disciples. Many times those kinds of churches end up making weak disciples. But He also says that we are to teach them to observe whatsoever things I have commanded you, and many times that is neglected. Sometimes people will say, "but we need to reach out to the lost!" Amen! and you know how you can do that? Get to know your friends and your family members that are lost, invite them into your homes. How about coming here to the church? There are lost people in this church every time you come here. Most of them are about this tall, you know, and a little bit taller. Get involved, there are lost people here.

There are dozens of men and women right now at Calvary Bible Church that need other people to come along side of them, face to face, one on one, bibles open and disciple them. That is the priority. This was certainly the priority of Phoebe and the other saints. By the way, folks let's be honest, it's a whole lot easier to serve the saints in the community than it is to serve the saints in the church. To invest time and dollars in our unsaved family members and friends is difficult. It's much easier to go to some third world country and build a church than it is to spend every Wednesday night working with the children at Awana. It's much easier to do some of these community outreach things than it is to find a person and realize, this person is in desperate need of discipleship and brother or sister every Tuesday night or every whatever night you come up with, and say "I'm going to be with you, and we are going to open up the word of God, we are going to study it, and we are going to apply it. I'm going to hold you accountable." That's what it means to really serve within the church.

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I fear that most church sponsored community outreach programs merely offer the illusion of spiritual service and in fact, betray spiritual neglect. It's easy to confuse activity with ministry. Being committed to the "one anothers" is hard work, but this is the model and the method of scripture. I might also add this is the purpose of spiritual gifts. As Peter said in 1 Peter 4:10: "As each one has received a spiritual gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

I Corinthians 12:7 the Holy Spirit has empowered us with spiritual gifts, "for the common good." So this needs to be the priority. So just remember that when you hear talk about community service and outreach, we have all kinds of opportunities for that within the context of our own church, and then with you being intentional in your relationships that God has placed in your path.

So Phoebe was a highly trusted and proven servant in her church. She was so devoted, that she was entrusted with the delivery of a copy of this sacred, and I might add, very expensive document to be given to the saints in Rome. So much so that her name is memorialized here in this text. I say expensive because writing materials were very expensive in those days. What they would do is they would also have scribes that would make various copies. They couldn't go into the copy machine and run them off, so they would have various copies that would be made knowing that this was indeed the inspired word of the living God.

So he says: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea, verse 2: that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints." In other words, I want you to love her as Christ loves her and as Christ loves you. We're all commanded to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 18:5: "Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me." Same idea here.

I might add that letters of personal commendation were customary among the saints in ancient days. Traveling was a very dangerous thing; it required lodging and food with friends and families. This could be dangerous if a person came to you, if you've got some women coming from Cenchrea with her entourage and she needs a place to stay, well who are you? Well, she needs a letter of commendation and that's what she would have had. In fact we read of examples of this, for example, the church at Ephesus gave a letter of commendation to Apollos in Acts 18:27. There we read: "And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciple to welcome him." Paul also wrote a letter of commendation on behalf of Titus and certain other faithful brothers that were travelling with him in 2 Corinthians 8:23: "As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you."

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Any of you that have traveled abroad know how important it is to have someone waiting outside the gate when you get off the plane in Nairobi, or Moscow, or Tel-Aviv or various places where I've been, you love seeing somebody holding up a sign with your name on it. They know that you're coming and they embrace you, and they whisk you into their cars. I always want to make sure that these are the right people before I just jump in their cars, but it's the same type of dynamic. People know ahead of time that we are coming. That's what would have happened here with Phoebe.

Traveling a great distance by land and sea would have been a requirement to get over to Rome and she would have had gone from church to church, had a protective escort and she would have needed lodging in various places, even before she got to Rome. They didn't have Holiday Inns or whatever like we have today. They did have Inn's, but you wouldn't want to go there. Most of them were brothels. This was very important for her to have a letter of commendation. So I'm sure when Phoebe arrived with her traveling companions, they were welcomed with open arms as Paul says, "in a manner worthy of the saints." I'm sure they did indeed, "help her in whatever she may need of you."

It's interesting when he says, whatever "matter" she may need of you. "Matter" is from the Greek word *pragma*, we get pragmatic from that. It can be defined as an undertaking, or an obligation, or some form of business. Evidently she had other important business matters that she was needing to tend to in Rome. So Paul's commendation was also a letter of reference to help her in her business transaction.

In verse 2 we read: "for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well." The term "helper" here is a real clue in understanding this dear sister. It translates the term "prostatis", it's used only here in the New Testament, but it was used to describe a patroness or benefactress, in other words a wealthy woman known for encouraging and financially supporting a particular cause or some kind of charity. Like we might describe a patron of the arts here in our culture. So it is safe to assume that Phoebe was a business woman of sorts of considerable means who gave of herself, of her wealth to support the church and the Apostle Paul.

John MacArthur perfectly summarizes Paul's loving indebtedness to this dear sister in Christ when he says, "This woman was emblematic of those countless women of God whom He has used and honored with great distinction within the framework of His divine plan." I can certainly attest to the profound impact that so many Godly women have had on my life many of whom are right here in this auditorium.

So we see not only his loving indebtedness for a sister in Christ, but secondly His affection for fellow saints and servants. Notice beginning in verse 3: "Greet Prisca (her diminutive name would have been Priscilla) and Aquila (a Jewish couple) my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."

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These were Paul's dear friends and co-laborers in the gospel who earlier would have fled from Rome to Corinth when the emperor Claudias expelled all of the Jews. According to Acts 18: 1-4 we read that Paul met them in Corinth in the synagogue because they were tent makers. The reason for that is when the Jews would come together for their services they would sit men with men, women with women, but they would sit according to whatever a career they had. So all the tentmakers would sit together so when Paul came in, he would sit with the tentmakers. In the providence of God he meets a fellow tent maker named Aquila and that began that great relationship, a fruitful relationship. You may also recall that later Priscilla and Aquila moved from Corinth over to Ephesus and there they heard a young Jewish preacher named Apollos. You remember Apollos, the word of God says was mighty in the scriptures, but they were very discerning and they saw that he was a little confused on certain aspects of the gospel that he was, according to Acts 18:26: "acquainted only with the baptism of John", so the text says: "so they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."

So we see that God moved these dear servants around to bless many others in the Nascent church there in the first century. They even risked their lives to save Paul's life; we don't know all of the details of all of that. So Paul says, "not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." How rare to find a husband and wife sincerely devoted to Christ. Too often it is one without the other. We should all pray without ceasing for our life partner that they would not only come to Christ, but join us in serving Him in oneness.

Later after the death of Emperor Claudius they would have returned to Rome. That's why they're being greeted here now and they obviously became leaders in one of the churches there. So verse 5 says, "Also greet the church that is in their house." Perhaps the church met there because, we know, that tent makers had very large rooms that was necessary for them to make their tents and it's always a blessing to host the saints in our homes and enjoy the residual blessing of Christ upon our dwelling.

Paul then continues his greetings in verse 5 he says, "Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia." That would have been modern turkey. He may have come to Christ through Paul's preaching there and perhaps Paul disciplined him, but certainly he was a beloved brother and the first convert there in modern Turkey. Verse 6, "greet Mary, who has worked hard for you." Mary or Miriam, which would have been the Semitic form of the name. Notice she worked hard. This is a term in the original language that denotes working tirelessly to the point of exhaustion. Oh to have more such workers within the church! Paul probably did not know her personally but he had heard of her reputation by others and she was probably a founding member of the church of one of the churches there in Rome.

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Then in verse 7: "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." These men were fellow countrymen, fellow Jews, probably from Jerusalem and most likely relatives whom God had saved we see before Paul. That would have meant that they would have known Paul when he was Saul, they were probably well aware of his Pharisaical zeal to kill Christians and to exterminate them. I'm sure that they would have prayed for him, they may even have had a chance to witness to him. We won't know until we get to heaven and then we can ask them. But together they enjoyed even after Paul came to Christ, they enjoyed a special personal bond having shared a prison cell on at least one occasion, perhaps more. I'm sure there would have been a lot of tearful memories of those times of suffering, and I might add singing. It seems like whenever Paul gets put in prison he is singing a lot more than he is suffering. So this would have been that background. They remember being shackled to a stone wall in a damp dungeon. So Paul would have known them well and could therefore say with confidence that they are "outstanding among the Apostles." The Apostles, by the way, this isn't referring to the 12 Apostles. Apostles simply mean, "Sent ones." So these were missionaries or itinerant evangelists had now become apart of one of the churches there in Rome.

Then verse 8: "Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord." Now we know nothing of this person but it's interesting that the single name Ampliatus is still visible on a very well decorated tomb in one of the earliest Christian catacombs in Rome, outside of Rome. Since free Romans always had three names and slaves had but one, there is a good indication that the Ampliatus on the well decorated tomb, was that of a slave. Perhaps, we don't know for sure, it was this brother in the Lord.

In verse 9: "Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved." Urbanus was a common roman name in Latin it means urbane, elegant, and polite. Given the fact that Paul calls Urbanus our fellow worker in distinction from Prisca and Aquila who he called my fellow workers, that may indicate that at one time this brother worked closely with the apostle Paul, but now is a notable co-worker in the Roman church or that he does not know him personally, but he is aware of his remarkable service within the gospel enterprise there at Rome. Stachys, which by the way, means "ear of corn" was a very uncommon Greek name but he calls him his beloved and this indicates a more intimate personal knowledge of this man, one that would have been forged in some kind of bond of ministry kind of experience.

Then in verse 10: "Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ." Apelles is a Greek name also used by Jews and it says here he was the "approved in Christ". I love that word approved, it means tested in battle. It means he was reliable, he was trustworthy, and he was dependable. He would have been a man that would not abandon the faith amidst difficult circumstances. How rare a find, especially in our day when we have so many uncommitted, cowardly Christians that fear man more than God. By the way, Awana children, you need to look closely at that word "approved", you are aware of 2 Timothy

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2:15, the key verse with your Awana studies. There you are told to: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth." I might add that for any person who is weak in the word, they will be weak in the battle for the gospel. That's just how it works, and they will be the type that will run for cover at the first sign of conflict.

Also in verse 10, he adds: "Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus." Now this speaks of a group of believers who may have been slaves or blood relatives of Aristobulus who, some scholars believe, was the brother of Herod Agrippa I and the grandson of Herod the great. So these would have been people believers within the context of that particular household.

Then in verse 11: "Greet Herodion, my kinsmen." So this would have been a fellow Jew and a brother in Christ, somehow related to the family of Herod, also linked therefore, to the household of Aristobulus. Verse 11 as well: "Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord." This indicates that not all of them in that household were in the Lord, some of them were. Some scholars believe that Narcissus, like Aristobulus, was another household that existed within the royal palace of the emperor. We know that there was a Narcissus who was the secretary of Emperor Claudius who became a very wealthy man collecting bribes from individuals who wanted access to the emperor. So these saints may have been members of this household and they may have been among the saints described in Philippians 4:22 who joined Paul who was then imprisoned in Rome. They were described as saints of "Caesar's household". They joined Paul in sending their greetings to the saints at Philippi.

Then we have a couple of interesting female names here in verse 12: "Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa." By the way Tryphaena means "delicate" and Tryphosa means dainty, workers in the Lord. Now these were probably sisters, maybe even twins. Parents then, as now, would give their daughters like sounding names. We see that much in our culture. But notice that they too were tireless workers, serving the Lord in the church at Rome, whom the Spirit of God now memorializes in this sacred text, two ladies.

Verse 12: "Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord." Here is another lady who undoubtedly received her name from her homeland of Persia. I want you to notice, carefully, she is not "my beloved, but "the beloved." The definite article here helps us understand that she is not only loved by the Lord, but she is loved by the entire church. She is "the" one that people love. Not only that, it says that she has worked hard in the Lord. This underscores not only the extent of her tireless labor for the Lord within the church but also it indicates that she is now very old, and no longer able to work as diligently as she once did. If this is so, Paul gives great care in paying tribute to this dear, elderly sister in Christ. Not allowing her past labors to be forgotten. I might add that this is a model that we would all do well to remember. Those saints who are up in their years, who have served faithfully and tirelessly for many generations, we should honor them.

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Then in verse 13 he says: "Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine." Now Rufus is an interesting character. It is the opinion of the early church, dating back to the early centuries, that Rufus is the son of Simon the Cyrene who was forced by the Romans to carry the cross of Jesus. We read about this in Mark 15:21. In fact, we know that Mark wrote his gospel in Rome, primarily to the Romans, after Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans. Therefore, in that text in Mark 15:21 he says this: "And they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country; Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross."

Now Mark would have not included the names of Alexander and Rufus without further commentary, had they not been well-known men within the early church and Simon would have certainly been one of the most honored saints of that day having carried the cross of Christ. I think it's amazing if you think back that in the providence of God, Simon just happens to be coming along at the time when Jesus is moving towards Calvary. And he just happened to be pressed into service by the Romans, to carry the cross of the one who undoubtedly became his Savior. Then through that he led his little boys, Alexander and Rufus to Christ and now Paul describes Rufus as a "choice man in the Lord." By the way, choice just meaning an exceptional, a special man in the Lord. Evidently, Simon the father is not mentioned here because he is probably deceased, otherwise Paul would have greeted him as well. Likewise, Alexander was either deceased or not living there in Rome.

But he does mention Rufus' mother, she was obviously still alive whom Paul describes as, "his mother and mine." I love that. She obviously had treated Paul as her own son and he loved her as his own mother. I certainly understand that with a number of you ladies and others that God has brought into my life by His grace down through the years.

Then in verse 14: "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. Now, this group of men is spoken of together because they would have been a group probably leaders in one of the several little churches there in Rome. The phrase "the brethren with them" would have referred to other members within the congregation, both men and women.

Then in verse 15: "Greet Philologus and Julia, (husband and wife) and Nereus and his sister and Olympus, and all the saints who are with them." These would have been the notable leaders of yet another one of the assembly there in Rome. There is some fascinating speculation about Nereus that I believe is worth mentioning. Barclay writes:

"In A.D. 95 there happened an event which shocked Rome. Two of the most distinguished people in Rome were condemned for being Christians. They were husband and wife. The husband was Flavius Clemens. He had been consul of Rome. The wife was Domatilla and she was of royal blood. She was the granddaughter of Vespasian, a former

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Emperor, and the niece of Domitian, the reigning Emperor. In fact the two sons of Flavius Clemens and Domatilla had been designated Domitian's successors in the imperial power. Flavius was executed and Domatilla was banished to the island of Pontia where years afterwards Paula saw the cave where "she [Domatilla] drew out a long martyrdom for the Christian name." And now the point-the name of the chamberlain of Flavious and Domatilla was Nereus. Is it possible that Nereus the slave had something to do with the making into Christians of Flavius Clemens the ex-consul and Domatilla the princess of the royal blood? Again maybe it is an idle speculation, for Nereus is a common name, but again, maybe it is true."

One day, when I'm in Heaven, I'm going to ask him and then we will know. I might also add that many, if not most of the saints that Paul is greeting here with such love would have been martyred for their faith but now they enjoy the eternal bliss of sweet fellowship with the lover of their souls.

Verse 16: "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." To kiss one on the forehead or the cheek was a common expression of mutually shared love among the brethren, those early believers. This was especially touching and important for those saints who had been rejected and abandoned by their biological families because of their faith in Christ. That's why it's interesting when you go to places, especially like Siberia and you meet with the saints there. Most of them have had family members who have been martyred for their faith. Most of them have been basically ex-communicated from other members of their family and their new family becomes their church family. What a joy it is to meet them and immediately feel that bond of grace that Christ has forged by His own blood. You know, on a personal note, the fellowship that we all share as brothers and sisters in Christ should never be taken for granted. It should be extended to all of the saints within our family, certainly not within our own little clique and we all tend to get that way, don't we? We got our own little group that we hang out with that we tell our secrets with. We always kind of sit together when we go over here to eat. It shouldn't be that way all the time. We need to express our love to one another as members of the family.

Given Paul's loving indebtedness for his sister in Christ and his affection for fellow saints it should be no surprise to see 3. His passion to protect the church from false teachers.

Notice verse 17: "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them." Now every shepherd knows that he must protect the sheep within his fold from what Christ called the "ravenous wolves" Matthew 7:15, and from the "thieves" who come to "steal and kill and destroy", John 10:10. The 2 weapons at the disposal of an apostolic shepherd are basically these. 1. He's got to proclaim the truth. 2. He has got to warn the sheep about the predators that would come in and teach lies and lead them astray. This is what Paul is doing here. He says keep your eye on. It translates the Greek

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verb "skopeo" and it means to notice carefully, to look critically at something as a judge would look at the facts in examining a case. By the way, we get our word "scope" that we would use in telescope or microscope from the noun form of this verb.

So he is saying, brethren I want you here, now this is an exhortation, I want you to scrutinize with great care, those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teachings with which you learn. In other words, those who cause disunity and hindrances, translates the Greek word "skandalon", which has the idea of putting an obstacle in a person's path. It was even used metaphorically to describe the bait stick on a trap. So, I want you to scrutinize with great care those who cause dissensions and obstacles in coming to faith and would cause some type of trickery that would lead people astray and cause a person to fall.

It's interesting in the original language; there are articles, the word "the" in front of dissensions and hindrances. The articles point to some kind of known division and known hindrances that those people would have been aware of. So he is saying I want you to keep your eye on those who cause the dissensions and the hindrances contrary to the teachings. So they would have been aware of the context of which he is speaking here. Of course this speaks of heretics that not only enter into the church through various ways, sometimes they become apart of our body, but they are constantly trying to get in here through the radio, through the television, through the Christian bookstores, etc. But also heretics that would rise up from the church and he tells us here what to do. I want you to "turn away" from them. This is very different from what many people want to do today. Many people today say we need to dialogue, we need to have a conversation, and we need to try to find common ground. No we don't, we need to turn away from them. You do not give them a platform, you do not debate with them, and you do not dialogue with them.

Titus 3:10: "Reject a factious man (hairesikon anthropon) after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." Perverted means he's twisting something. Literally the term in the original language means to turn something inside out. I call these people scripture twisters. Try saying that 4 times real fast. That's what people will do and they are self-condemned meaning they are self-willed, un-submissive. They are what you might call loose cannons. We are to do this after 2 warnings which are consistent with the process of church discipline which the Lord has set fourth in Matthew 18. If this person remains unrepentant in their heresies, in their dissensions, in all their trickery, they are to be expelled from the church.

Verse 18: "For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites." In other words, they are motivated by self-interests, they are motivated by self-gratification. If you read Jude's little epistle, or you go to 2 Peter, for example, you will see that false teachers are given by 3 things. They are driven by Power, Sex, and Greed. To put it differently, they are driven by fame, fortune, and sexual lust. They are arrogant, you will

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read there, they are un-teachable, they are self-absorbed, they are sensual, and they are greedy. According to 2 Peter 2:3, "and they will exploit you with false words." Literally cheat you, and they are dangerous Paul tells us here in Romans 16:18: "by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." In other words they will come across as genuine, as caring, as spiritual, as loving, as wise, and as deep.

Paul describes them in 2 Timothy 3:5: "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Unfortunately, we see this time and time again especially with women who are weak in truth, who are weak in virtue, and who are therefore ruled by their emotions. They become easy targets for false teachers; they are easily seduced by them. Again, if you even look at the audience for Christian publishing and the audience for Christian radio, and the audience for Christian TV., it is primarily women in their 40's especially those who have been divorced and who do not have a shepherd in their life. Satan knows exactly where to go.

Now that's not to say that women are the only ones deceived by no means, but certainly we see that dynamic. Many times woman and men have been deceived by false teachers bring these kinds of false teachings into the church and maybe unwittingly deceive others. I might add, just parenthetically, that the elders deal with this every single week. We are bombarded with these types of things.

But in light of these dangers Paul commends them saying, "For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil." In other words, don't be ignorant and naive of false teaching, of evil teaching, but don't immerse yourself in studying it. Folks, it is dangerous, it is demonic, it is contagious, and it is for this reason that Jude even warns that we should hate "even the garment polluted by the flesh." So we need to be wise in the truth so we can quickly spot counterfeit.

Then he closes in verse 20: "And the God of peace will soon (in other words speedily, quickly) crush Satan under your feet." We know that one day the father of lies is going to be forever banished because Christ has won the victory as He promised in Genesis 3:15, and this is the text he is eluding to here where we read: "He, (referring to the Messiah) shall bruise you, (referring to Satan) on the head." That is he is going to inflict mortal wound upon the enemy of our souls and one day we will experience the great triumph of that reality. So he says: "the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." Then he merely closes this section by speaking on behalf of his companions, his travelling and ministry companions. Verse 21: "Timothy my fellow worker (protégé) greets you, and so do I Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen." By the way, Jason, we know, was one of

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the first converts in Thessalonica and he even hosted Paul before he went with Silas to Berea. Sosipater met Paul at Troas after he departed for Ephesus and was one of the noble minded Bereans that examined the scriptures daily.

Verse 22: "I Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord." This was Paul's secretary that is taking the dictation, he adds his greeting.

Verse 23: "Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you." We know that Gaius came to Christ under Paul's preaching in Corinth. Paul even baptized him personal according to 1 Corinthians 1:14. We know that he even hosted the congregation in his home. Then he says, "Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, (prominent official in Corinth) and Quartus, the brother" (In other words a brother in Christ).

Verse 24: [The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.] This is bracketed at least in the New American Standard and other Bibles as well because it is not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of Paul's epistle, but certainly the expression is appropriate because it expresses Paul's heart in this amazing little epilogue.

Here we see the heart of the dear apostle and his passion for strengthening the bond of grace. May we all be diligent to that same end amongst ourselves?

Let's pray together, Father thank you for this passage of scripture that gives us insight into the saints of old and helps us understand more of who we need to be as workers that toil, tirelessly for the gospel within our church and from there reaching out unto those that You send our way to make disciples and to teach them to observe all the things that You have commanded. Lord help us to live these things out in a way that brings You great joy and great glory and likewise blesses us immensely for Jesus' sake, Amen.