"The Small World of Christian Friends"
Romans 16:1-16

Message by Michael J. Barnard November 15, 2026

Teaching Aim: To realize how small and close knit the Christian community was in Paul's day and, in many ways, still is today. To see that Paul was not only an apostle to the church, but that he was also a friend to those he ministered with. To develop an appreciation for every member of the body of Christ as we co-labor together for the glory of God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD'S WORD *(BIBLE STUDY)*

Part I: The example of Phoebe as a *"diakonos"* (Rom. 16:1-2)

1. The name Phoebe means *"bright and radiant"* (**vs. 1**). According to **verses 1 and 2**, did Phoebe live up to her name? If so, how? Cenchrea was the eastern port for Corinth, located just 6 miles east of the city on the Saronic Gulf. What was Pheobe's role in the church of Cenchrea (**vs. 1**)?

2. Phoebe also had the important role of being the currier of this epistle from Paul to the church in Rome. What did Paul ask the Christian church at Rome to do for her once she arrived from her long journey bringing this epistle (**vs. 2**)? What can we learn about her ministry from this verse? What can we learn about her friendship with the apostle Paul from **verse 2**?

3. The Greek word for *"servant"* used in **verse 1** is *"diakonos,"* the feminine form of the Greek word that we get our English word *"deacon"* from. Many have used this verse in an attempt to argue that Phoebe held *"the office"* of deacon at the church of Cenchrea, but did she? *"Diakonoi"* can either refer to: 1) *"the office"* of deacon as described in Scripture; or 2) to those who serve the church in general. According to **1 Tim. 3:12**, does Pheobe meet the qualifications for the church office of deacon? Why or why not? Do we find any women listed among the original seven deacons in **Acts 6:1-6**? What hotly debated restrictions did Paul place on those serving in church government in **1 Tim. 2:11 & 12** (interestingly enough, right before the qualifications that are given for the offices of elder and deacon in **1 Tim. 3**)? Why do you think, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul included the qualifications listed for deacon's wives in **1 Tim. 3:11**? Why is it important to examine the wife (as well as the husband) while looking at a man who is being considered for the office of deacon?

Part II: The tremendous example of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5)

1. Aquila and Priscilla were two of Paul's closest companions and co-workers for the kingdom of God. What kind of secular work did the three of them do together? (See **Acts 18:3**) At some point, Aquila and Priscilla apparently risked their lives to save the apostle Paul. We don't know exactly where or when this took place, but it could have occurred during the riots in Ephesus. (See **Acts 19:26-31**) What happened because of their bravery (**vs. 4**)? How has the courageous act of Aquila and Priscilla affected you today? The tentmaking business helped to fund the ministry of Paul, Aquila, and Pricilla, but what was their real work (**vs. 5**)? (See **Acts 18:4; 1 Cor. 16:19**) Our earthly jobs help pay our way through life, but what should our real work be? How are you currently serving in Christian ministry today?

2. Aquila and Priscilla are one of the best biblical examples of a husband wife team serving the Lord together (**vs. 1**). What can we learn from this couple and their example? Is there any significance in Priscilla's name being listed before her husband in 4 of the 8 times they are mentioned in the Bible together? What can we learn about the value of women in ministry from the example of the many ladies listed in **Romans chapter 16**?

Part III: The church at Rome was a hub for evangelical activity in the ancient world. (Rom. 16:6-16)

1. According to **verse 5**, who do we find among the first converts to Christ in Achaia? (See **1 Cor. 16:15**) There are six Mary's listed in the Bible, what do we remember this Mary for (**vs. 6**)? It is important to realize God is watching and remembering everything we do behind the scenes. What are some ways that you are working behind the scenes to build up the kingdom of God?

2. Junia can be either a male or female name, much like the name *"Pat"* today. Most commentators believe Andronicus and Junia were another husband-and-wife team. What can we learn about this team from **verse 7**? What did Paul mean when he wrote, *"they are my countrymen?"* How about when he said, *"they are of note among the apostles?"* (See Commentaries) Were they apostles in a secondary sense like missionaries today, or were they noted by the apostles for their ministry?

3. Amplias, Urbanas, and Stachys were all common slave names found among the list of slaves who served in Caesar's household. What can we learn about each of these saints from the greeting given to them by the apostle Paul in **verses 8 and 9**? How does the statement, *"The ground is level at the foot of the cross"* relate to everyone listed in this chapter as well as to us today?

4. What can we learn about Apelles from **verse 10**? What is meant when we say that someone is *"approved in Christ?"* Does this comment describe your walk with Jesus? An unnamed group of people are mentioned in **verse 10**, this group is simply referred to as *"the "household of Aristobulus."* Many believe Aristobulus was the brother of Herod Agrippa 1 and grandson of Herod the Great. Aristobulus is not mentioned as being included in this group and may not even be a believer, rather it is his household that is described in the text. Who do you think these unnamed individuals were? According to **1 Corinthians 12:12**, each member of the church body is critically important to all the other members. Why is this? Name a few people in your church who are quietly and faithfully serving the Lord behind the scenes in ministry? How is their service working for the good of the rest of the church?

5. In ancient days, freemen often took the names of their patrons. What can we learn about *"Herodion"* from **verse 11**? What else can we learn about Herodion from Paul's greeting? Narcissus may possibly have been the secretary of Caesar Claudius who was forced to commit suicide by Agrippina once Nero ascended to the throne as the Roman Emperor. Who do you think the individuals are who are listed in **verse 11**? According to **verses 10 and 11**, how far had the church reached geographically by the time Paul had written the Book of Romans?

6. Tryphena and Tryphosa (meaning "delicate" and "dainty") were most likely sisters, possibly even twins (**vs. 12**). What can we learn about these two women from Paul's comments to the Romans? *"Persis"* means *"Persian woman"* and can also be interpreted *"the one loved."* What do we learn about Persis from Paul's simple reference to her?

7. *"Rufus"* is an especially interesting individual. Tradition says that Rufus may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene who is mentioned in **Mark 15:20-21**. Why do you think Rufus is named as being *"chosen in the Lord?"* Aren't all Christians *"chosen in the Lord?"* (See Commentaries) What made Rufus so unique to other Christians? Why do you think Rufus' mother was loved so much by the early church and by the apostle Paul?

8. **Verses 14 & 15** list individuals who were most likely involved in home churches. What is a home church? Why do you think believers met in home churches during the first two centuries of church history instead of larger buildings like we meet in today? What are some of the differences between the home churches of today in our own country and home churches during biblical times? What are some of the advantages to meeting in smaller groups instead of large churches?

9. What is *"a holy kiss"* and when was it given in biblical times (**vs. 16**)? Is it still given in parts of the world today? What was the significance of this kiss? What do we use today as the American equivalent of a holy kiss? What are some ways that our church family demonstrates love and friendship today? What are some things that the Christian church could do to be even more loving today?

MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- Phoebe was an extraordinary woman who was a servant in the church of Cenchrea, well respected by all including the apostle Paul.
- Faithful husband and wife teams in ministry like Aquilla and Prescilla are a blessing to any church.
- Regardless of our social status, the ground is level at the foot of the cross.
- The gospel had already reached Caesar's household, even before Paul had personally come to Rome.
- Rufus may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried the crossbeam for Jesus to Golgotha after Christ became too weak to carry it himself.
- Encouraging other believers is important, Paul never forgot those who served with him in ministry, neither should we.