

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 7-3-11 PM
"LOVING LAST WORDS"
ROMANS 16:1-20
#72 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through Romans"

I. Commendation (vv. 1-2)

"Never was there a greater burden carried by such tender hands. The theological history of the church through the centuries was in the manuscript which she brought with her. The reformation was in her luggage. The blessing of multitudes in our day was carried in those parchments."

—Donald Barnhouse

A. Sister (v. 1)

B. Servant (v. 1)

C. Saint (v. 2)

II. Greetings (vv. 3-16)

Acts 18:1-3 (NKJV) "1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers."

Acts 18:24-26 (NKJV) "24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."

Philippians 4:22 (NKJV) "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household."

Mark 15:21 (NKJV) "Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross."

III. Caution (vv. 17-19)

Acts 20:28-31a (NKJV) "28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch..."

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NKJV) "3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

A. The Danger of Division (v. 17)

1. Note Them (v. 17a)

2. Avoid Them (v. 17b)

Titus 3:10 (ESV) "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him."

B. The Description of the Dividers (v. 18)

1. Their Motivation (v. 18a)

“No matter how sincere and caring false teachers or preachers may appear to be, they are never genuinely concerned for the cause of Christ or for His church. They are driven by self-interest and self-gratification—sometimes for fame, sometimes for power over their followers, always for financial gain, and frequently for all of those reasons. Many of them enjoy pretentious and luxurious life-styles, and sexual immorality is the rule more than the exception.”

—John MacArthur

2. Their Methodology (v. 18b)

2 Peter 1:4 (NKJV) “by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.”

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NKJV) “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”

C. The Directions for Discernment (v. 19)

Matthew 10:16 (NKJV) “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

Romans 12:9b (NKJV) “Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”

IV. Promise (v. 20)

Genesis 3:15 (NKJV) “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

Revelation 12:11 (NKJV) “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

Revelation 20:10 (NKJV) “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing;
Doest ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He.
Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

—Martin Luther (1529)

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 7-3-11 PM
“LOVING LAST WORDS”
ROMANS 16:1-20
#72 in Series, “Verse by Verse through Romans”

One of the reasons I like the last part of chapter 15 and chapter 16 is that these verses give us personal insight into the Apostle Paul’s life. Romans is the most intensely doctrinal book of the Bible and after 14 chapters of doctrine, we are ready for some insight into the man’s life who God used to give us this deep doctrinal truth. Some think that if a person elevates doctrine (as Paul does), they are not “relational” and are rather “stuffy” and certainly no fun to be around. I think we would be surprised if we could spend some time with Paul to find that he was a people person. He was a friend maker as well as a disciple maker and a great theologian. In chapter 16 he gives greetings to 26 people by name and 2 people by description. He was a rare combination of a deep theologian and yet intensely interested in people. As we examine these people he gives greeting to, we see all kinds of people. Some of them were men, some women, some likely “well to do” and some were likely slaves. What makes all these personal greetings so amazing is that Paul had never even been to Rome! How did he know all these people? Some he had doubtlessly met on his missionary journeys; at least one, he had led to faith before this man moved to Rome. Some were perhaps from his prayer list where he had entered the names of loved ones or friends of the people he met on his many journeys. Paul was no Lone Ranger who shunned relationships. Oh that God would make us a church that is intensely doctrinal and yet relational. Those two are not mutually exclusive. I think that we are a little off balance on the doctrinal side. The most common reason that people leave our church (people who are not moving to another area) is that they “cannot connect with others”. I would estimate that this is the at least stated reason of 75-80% who leave this fellowship. Sometimes that is not legitimate – it is simply an excuse. If they have never gotten in a Lifegroup, how would they ever expect to be “connected”? But for others, they have genuinely tried to make relationships and have been unable. I am praying that God will give us wisdom to know how to be more relational without letting up at all on the emphasis on doctrine.

Let’s dig into the text. We will skim through verses 1-16 and then spend considerable time on verses 17-20.

I. A Commendation (V1-2)

It is likely that Phoebe delivered the letter to the church at Rome. She was probably a well to do business woman much as Lydia was in Acts 16. One hint of this is that the word ‘helper’ used to describe her in verse 2 is the word we get “patron” from. It refers to one who supports financially [for example, “a patron of the arts” is someone who supports the arts]. In her business, she must have had to go to Rome and since Paul knew and trusted her, he gave her this important letter the Holy Spirit had inspired him to write. Dr Donald Barnhouse referred to this daunting task of delivering what we call “Romans” to the church at Rome: “Never was there a greater burden carried by such tender hands. The theological history of the church through the centuries was in the manuscript which she brought with her. The reformation was in her luggage. The blessing of multitudes in our day was carried in those parchments” [Donald Barnhouse, quoted in James Boice, “Romans, Volume IV”, Page 1913]. Paul uses three words to describe Phoebe.

A. Sister (V1)

Phoebe was a true child of God and thus a spiritual sister to every other child of God. For some reason it went out of style to call one another “brother” or “sister”, but that is what we are. Have you ever thought about the fact that our biological family is temporary, but our spiritual family is permanent? We will be spiritual brothers and sisters throughout eternity.

B. Servant (V1)

This word is the same word that we get Deacon from. Some interpret that as saying that Phoebe was a deaconess in the church. The NIV gives an alternate translation for that word of “Deaconess”. There were

certainly many women that served in the church, but there doesn't seem to be any good reason why we should turn this description of Phoebe into a holder of an office called deaconess. The last part of verse two indicates that she had served and helped many, including the Apostle Paul.

C. Saint (V2)

The word "saint" means set apart one. Every person who has savingly believed on the Lord Jesus Christ is a saint. The predominant concept of saint today comes not from the Bible but from Roman Catholicism. A saint is not a high, lofty category of Christians; it is a word that describes every true Christian.

Phoebe is commended as a sister, a servant, and a saint who brought the letter of Romans to the church at Rome.

II. Greetings (V3-16)

From these personal greetings to several members of the church at Rome, we get much insight as to what kind of people made up the early church. I am not going to mention every name, but I do want to focus in on a few.

Pricilla and Aquila (V3-5a)

For most of the people that Paul greets in this passage, we have no other reference to them in Scripture, but we have multiple references to Priscilla and Aquila. It is likely that Paul led them to Christ and then they became a volunteer couple who traveled together to wherever they were needed. They had their own business which involved the same trade as Paul. We read of them in **Acts 18:1-3 (NKJV)** "¹ After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers." We find this couple who has now come to Christ in **Acts 18:24-26 (NKJV)** "²⁴ Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." That's only two of the six places we read about this couple. Notice how precious they were to Paul. In Romans 16:4 he says that they risked their own necks for Paul. Literally, it says that they placed their own necks under the executioner's axe. In Rome they actually had a part of the church that met in their house.

Epaenetus (V5b)

This man was the first one in Asia (sometimes called Asia Minor – the general area of today's Turkey) to convert to Christ. Since Paul was the first one to preach the gospel in Asia, Paul had led him to Christ. Paul had kept track of him and knew that he was a part of the church at Rome.

Amplias (V8)

From history and archeology, we learn that this was a common name for slaves – especially those in homes of government officials. He may have been the one Paul was referring to in **Philippians 4:22 (NKJV)** "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." Here was a church with free people and slaves who were on the same level at church.

Rufus (V13)

Who was Rufus? If you look it up in a concordance, you will find the name Rufus in **Mark 15:21 (NKJV)** "Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross." Why would Mark mention Simon of Cyrene's sons unless they were known in Rome? In addition, Mark's gospel was originally written especially for the church at Rome. What a story that makes! Can we do some sanctified speculation and see that from the being constrained to carry Jesus' cross that Simon trusted in Christ and now his son was active in the church in Rome?

The phrase "his mother and mine" did not mean that they were physical brothers. It was a way of saying that Rufus' mother had been like a mother to Paul.

Verse 16

A kiss was the normal friendly greeting. It is a peck on the cheek that had much the same meaning as our warm handshake.

III. Caution (V17-19)

At first reading these verses seem out of place. Some have even speculated that they were added later. I think they fit perfectly here. Paul greets those that he loves in Rome and then he does one of the most loving things we can do for those we love – he warns them of the dangers of false teaching. This warning is typical for the Apostle Paul in the letters he wrote because he genuinely loved the people of the churches to whom he wrote. For example, he says to the Ephesian Elders in **Acts 20:28-31a (NKJV)** “²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch...” In Galatia, Judaizers had come with a false gospel and Paul warned them in Galatians 1:6. He gives a general warning in **2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NKJV)** “³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” Why all these warnings? It is because false teaching does not crash through the front door, it slips in the back door. The Devil is not always seeking to destroy churches by attacking them; sometimes he is joining them! No preacher is worth his salt who does not warn his people of false teachers. To warn is an evidence of love.

A. The Danger of Division (V17)

Unity is such a beautiful thing that it calls for harsh words toward anything that would threaten to destroy it. Paul is not speaking of the weaker brethren dealt with in chapter 14. We are to come alongside them and be patient with them. Here, he is talking about satanically empowered false teachers. These false teachers cause divisions. That word “divisions” comes from a Greek word meaning discord or separation. The word “offenses” is translated “create obstacles” in the ESV and “pitfalls” in the HCSB. It is that which causes someone to stumble. It also referred to the trigger on a trap that was baited and when the bait was taken, the animal was captured. That is what false teachers do. They cause separations in the body of Christ and trap people and cause them to stumble. It is interesting how many different varieties of false teaching there are and yet none of them are new. A thorough study of church history will show that all we have today is old false teaching under a new name. Notice the specific instructions relating to false teachers.

1. Note them (V17a)

The phrase “note them” is translated “watch out for” in the ESV, and “keep your eye on those” in the NASB. It means to scrutinize, to analyze with intensity. Let me show you why these false teachers are so dangerous. The word “contrary” in verse 17 is the Greek word “para” that means to come along side. False teaching comes alongside the truth but deviates from the truth enough so that the doctrine is not truth. It does resemble the truth. That is why we must watch, keep our eye on, and scrutinize with intensity. The best lie is the one that sounds most like the truth. When is a watch more dangerous – when it is 15 minutes off or 5 hours off? It is when it is 15 minutes off because we would know that it is wrong if it was 5 hours off, but 15 minutes could cause us to miss an important appointment.

2. Avoid Them (V17b)

For the sake of truth based unity, Paul calls for some truth based division. I have said over and over that as important as unity is, truth is more important than unity. When it comes to true unity, doctrine is the basis of unity. In other words, when a person departs from the apostles’ doctrine, this a greater threat to unity than the disunity caused by avoiding these false teachers. The only unity that counts is the unity grounded in the truth of the apostles’ teaching (the New Testament). We see similar instruction in **Titus 3:10 (ESV)** “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing

more to do with him”. If a false teacher will not turn from their false teaching to the truth, we are to avoid them. If they are a member of the fellowship, that would involve church discipline.

B. The Description of the Dividers (V18)

1. Their Motivation (V18a)

These false teachers are motivated by their own base interests. The word “belly” refers to their appetites. John MacArthur spells out the danger in his typical blunt way. “No matter how sincere and caring false teachers or preachers may appear to be, they are never genuinely concerned for the cause of Christ or for His church. They are driven by self-interest and self-gratification – sometimes for fame, sometimes for power over their followers, always for financial gain, and frequently for all of those reasons. Many of them enjoy pretentious and luxurious life-styles, and sexual immorality is the rule more than the exception” [John MacArthur, “Romans 9-16 Commentary”, Page 374].

2. Their Methodology (V18b)

They use smooth words and flattering speech. This is referring to words that disguise themselves as loving and wanting only your best but in doing so they deny the truths of Scripture. They speak of self esteem instead of self denial; they speak of your prosperity instead of your sacrifice. They don’t say negative things like pointing out sin. They pervert the love of God and neglect the wrath of God. They speak of material prosperity rather than a cross. They are in fact enemies of the cross.

C. The Directions for Discernment (V19)

To paraphrase, he is saying, “You are a great church, but be careful.” The last part of verse 19 reminds us of **Matthew 10:16 (NKJV)** “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” We read in **Romans 12:9b (NKJV)** “Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.” You don’t have to experience what is bad to know it is bad. To be simple (innocent) in what is evil is not to be ignorant of it or naive about it. As experts on detecting counterfeit bills tell us, the best way to spot a counterfeit is to be an expert on what a genuine bill looks like. One old farmer put it this way, “You don’t have to eat slop to preach to hogs”. Satan seduces many into the occult and into false teaching with the lure of “understanding it better”. Many times false teaching seduces people into it with the enticement to broaden your mind. If your mind gets too broad, it gets thin in the middle. Saturate yourself with truth and you will be able to spot evil easy enough.

I heard about a man who applied to be a river boat pilot. He was asked, “Do you know where the sand bars are?” He said “no”. “Do you know where the shoals and reefs are?” He said “no”. “Then how do you think you can be a river boat pilot?” He said, “I know where the channel is”. You don’t have to be an expert on false teaching to avoid error. Just be an expert in the truth.

III. Promise (V20)

The word “shortly” doesn’t mean “in a little while”. It means “quickly” or “swiftly”. There is a sense that Satan has been defeated, he is being defeated, and he will one day be defeated. Let me explain. We read in **Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)** “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” On the cross Satan was defeated in the sense that that Christ won and Satan’s doom was sealed. He is a defeated foe!! Satan is being defeated. As we stand in the authority that is ours in Christ and refuse Satan’s temptations and take the way of escape when temptation comes and put on the armor and resist the devil and cause him to flee from us, we are in a sense identified with Jesus and have our foot on Satan’s head in victory. We have the resources we need to walk in victory over the evil one. **Revelation 12:11 (NKJV)** “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” As we daily overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, Satan is overcome and in a sense we have our foot on His head because of Jesus’ victory. Ah, but there is coming a day when he will be finally and fully defeated. **Revelation 20:10 (NKJV)** “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

CONCLUSION

Let me close with my favorite verses of Martin Luther's Hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" written in 1529.

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing;
Doest ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He.
Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.
(3261)*