

RIGHT IN ROMANS

Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans

by

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CHAPTER NINE

POSTSCRIPTS (15:14-16:27)

The Epistle to the Romans regarded as a doctrinal treatise really comes to a close with the benediction in 15:13. What follows in the remaining chapter and a half may be regarded as a short series of postscripts containing matters of interest and importance to the readers which lie, however, outside the argument whereby Paul has established his great thesis that justification is by faith and must, if genuine, issue in sanctification of life. We shall, therefore, pass somewhat hurriedly over this closing portion of the Epistle, just indicating the general contents of the successive postscripts and touching upon a few of the more salient and suggestive points.

A. The Nature of Paul's Ministry (15:14-21)

In verse 14 the apostle reminds his readers that they are deeply appreciative of the Gospel and have a rich understanding of its contents so that they are able to help one another to make progress in the truth. How is it with the rank and file of members in the modern church? Do they take pains through availing themselves of the means of grace at their command to feed the springs of their inner being so that their lives may overflow in streams of blessing to others, particularly to their fellow Christians?

In verses 15 and 16 Paul next refers to the fact that the writing of this letter to the Church at Rome was part of his larger service as a divinely appointed apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, he seems to say, if we read between the lines correctly, they should give most earnest heed to the message that he has been inspired and led of God to write to them. It ill behooves Christians in our day to ignore or despise the weighty teachings of this immortal treatise that so clearly set forth the foundations of the Christian faith.

Verses 17 to 21 are an upwelling of Paul's sense of stewardship with regard to his lifework. He is deeply cognizant of the greatness and glory attendant upon the Gospel ministry. But he realizes that he is only a humble instrument in the hands of Jesus Christ to whom belongs all the honor for whatever he has been privileged to achieve under His direction and with the endowment of His power. Those of us who are engaged in full-time Christian service need to be very careful to glory not so much in what we do for Christ as in what He does through us. Let us boast not of ourselves; let us make our boast in the Lord whose we are and whom we serve.

B. The Apostle's Plans (15:22-23)

In the paragraph comprising verses 22-23 Paul outlines his plans to visit Rome after going to Jerusalem with the contributions for the church in that city which he has gathered from Gentile churches in Europe and Asia Minor. But he is apprehensive as to the fate that may be awaiting him at Jerusalem, and so he entreats his readers to intercede with God in his behalf that the cause of the Gospel may not be unduly hindered by his enemies, and that he may be spared to see the fruition of his long-cherished dream to visit Rome and then to carry the Gospel to the westernmost confines of the Empire.

C. A Word for Phoebe (16:1, 2)

In the first two verses of chapter 16 we find the apostle commending to the Church in Rome Phoebe, the bearer of the Epistle. He urges that they look after her wants and take the best of care of her, especially in view of her great helpfulness to others. One can but wonder if Phoebe realized what an immortal treasure of truth for the whole Christian Church throughout the centuries to come was entrusted to her hands.

D. Miscellaneous Greetings (16:3-16)

With several notable exceptions, little is known concerning those to whom Paul here sends greetings save the bare mention of their names. But though otherwise unknown to fame, they are not unknown to Him whose eye misses not the tiniest bit of service for the kingdom rendered in his name. The world views the mighty river; the Lord beholds each and every obscure and hidden tributary. The newly built 200-inch telescope—the largest ever built by men—is powerful enough to catch the light of a candle flame 50,000 miles distant! If the inventive genius of man is capable of constructing so potent an aid to vision, surely the eye of Jesus Christ will not overlook any life that shines for Him in even the remotest corners of earth.

E. Warning against false teachers (16:17-20)

The enemy of souls has evidently been busy trying to sow tares in the Church at Rome by the promulgation of error and fomenting of dissension. False doctrines ever make for division and disruption in the Lord's work. And not only so, but they plunge their victims in dire peril that may issue in eternal separation from God when they take the form of spurning the redemptive death of Jesus upon the cross of Calvary. Those who have souls committed to their shepherding can ill afford to welcome and encourage wolves in sheep's clothing that work such deadly damage to the Church of Christ.

F. Further Greetings (16:21-23)

Here we have greetings to the Church at Rome from several of Paul's fellow laborers, from Tertius his amanuensis, from Gaius in whose home the letter was written, and from Erastus the treasurer of the city of Corinth. The friendliness among believers and between churches was an outstanding characteristic of apostolic Christianity.

Never ought the fires of sympathy and fellow-feeling in the Church of Christ to be allowed to die down, for the eternal bonds that unite all true believers in Jesus are of such immeasurably greater value and importance than the accidental temporalities that divide.

G. Concluding Doxology (16:25-27)

With reference to this concluding doxology we can perhaps do no better than to quote the comment on it by William Sanday in his masterly exposition of Romans in the International Critical Commentary:

“The doxology,” he writes, “sums up all the great ideas of the Epistle. The power of the Gospel which Paul was commissioned to preach; the revelation in it of the eternal purpose of God; its contents, faith; its sphere, all the nations of the earth; its author, the one wise God, whose wisdom is thus vindicated—all these thoughts had been continually dwelt on. And so at the end feeling how unfit a conclusion would be the jarring note of verses 17-20, and wishing to ‘restore the Epistle at its close to its tone of serene loftiness,’ the apostle adds these verses, writing them perhaps in those large, bold letters which seem to have formed a sort of authentication of his Epistle (Galatians 6:11), and thus gives an eloquent conclusion to his great argument.”

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