**Lesson 42: We Are in This Together!**

Text: Romans 16:1-16

**Introduction**

If I asked you to name the last five Heisman trophy winners, the last five NBA champions, the last five World Series Champions, the five wealthiest individuals living today, and the last five Nobel Peace Prize recipients, few would be able to do so. However, if I asked you to name five people who have had an impact on your life, you could very quickly do so. You don’t have to have wealth, power, and success to have an impact on lives. In this closing section of Paul’s letter to the Romans, he specifically mentions individuals living in Rome who have had an impact on his life. I realize that the study of a list of foreign names does not seem like the most exciting form of Bible study. I’m sure we have all been guilty of skimming over sections like these. However, it had great significance to the first recipients of the letter and has great insights for us today.

1. **The letter to the Romans concludes with the longest list of personal greetings of all of Paul’s letters.** 
   1. This is an interesting note when you consider that he had never been to Rome! We need to account for the reasons why there is such a lengthy list in comparison with the other epistles.
   2. There were people living in Rome who Paul met during his missionary journeys. Many of them left Rome when Claudius ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome (Acts 18:2). As a result, they heard the gospel in various parts of the Roman Empire. Now that the ban against Jews had been lifted, many of them returned to their home country. They joined the church in Rome and would have looked forward to the visit of the Apostle Paul. Thus, one reason Paul included such a long list was because there were many in the church who he knew and others he did not. He could not send a general greeting to them as in other letters (1 Corinthians 16:20). He had to specify his greeting.
   3. It also served another purpose. It would give confidence to the members who did not personally know Paul. There was a measure of controversy surrounding the ministry of Paul. As we have studied throughout the letter, there was particular apprehension on the part of the Jewish believers. Their concerns could be set at ease by other Jewish believers who knew and loved the Apostle.
2. **Paul encouraged the congregation in Rome to welcome Phebe into their midst. (v. 1-2)** 
   1. Letters of recommendation were important in their day, as they are in ours.
   2. Phebe was on a business trip to Rome and transported Paul’s letter to the believers. Your Bible may note this at the conclusion of the letter. What an important task for this dear lady!
   3. She was from Cenchrea, which was approximately eight miles from Corinth where Paul wrote the letter. It is obvious that he became acquainted with her during his lengthy ministry in that area.
   4. He referred to her as a “servant of the church.” This is the feminine form of the word from which we receive our word “deacon.” Does that mean that Paul acknowledged her as a deaconess? That is not Paul’s intent. He is simply communicating that she was a faithful worker in the church. Paul’s letter to Timothy makes it clear that the one who holds the office of deacon must the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:12). That disqualifies Phebe from holding the office of a deacon, but she certainly performed the role of one who cared for people in the church. You don’t have to have a title to be a servant! It is most likely that Phebe cared for the sick in their congregation. Perhaps she had a ministry of visiting the shut-ins. She may have been in a position to assist various members of the church who were struggling financially. The text seems to indicate that she was woman of great resources. Paul said that she had helped many, including himself.
   5. Paul encouraged those in Rome to “receive her” which means to give her a warm welcome and to assist her in whatever she might need during her visit.
   6. We have many “Phebes” in our church family. I am grateful for those ladies who have faithfully served the Lord for many years. They may not be as well-known as the Apostle Paul, but they have a ministry that is recognized by our Lord.
3. **Paul sent personal greeting to the members of the church in Rome who had an impact on his life. (v. 3-16)** 
   1. The names provide insight to the people who comprised the members of the church. They were predominantly Gentile names. The majority of the names were also names given to servants rather than wealthy individuals. We can also see from the text that the church had grown to the point that they had to meet in various homes (v. 5, 14, 15).
   2. There seems to be two groups mentioned in the list. Paul first mentions those who he appears to know very well (v. 3-7) and later those who he knew more casually (v. 8-15).
   3. Paul had a special relationship with Priscilla and Aquila. (v. 3-5) They met in Corinth during Paul’s second missionary journey (Act 18:1-3). He lived in their home because they shared the same tent-making craft. Paul dearly loved this couple. They risked their own lives for Paul and were a blessing to other churches. We are blessed to have several husband and wife teams like Aquila and Priscilla. There are several who have opened their homes to missionaries and full-time Christian workers. They may not stand to preach before crowds, but they have been a help to the work of the gospel.
   4. We will not go into a lengthy study of the other names mentioned in this section of Paul’s letter. We do not have much information about them since they are mentioned only here. The list of names indicates that Paul did not function as a “lone ranger” in the work of the gospel. He needed the ministry of the people that he mentioned in this text. This is an important lesson for all of us. God did not design any of our lives to be lived alone. He saved you and placed you in a church family. He knew that we would need each other. Paul communicated this need for others in this section of his letter. We do well to follow his example in cultivating godly friendships.
   5. Paul’s reference to the “churches” refers to those churches started by Paul that took part in his missions support (v. 16). He hoped that the church in Rome might join these churches in supporting his work of world evangelism. This plural reference to the noun “church” is a significant reference. It affirms the doctrine of the local church. The Bible does not teach a “universal church.” Jesus and Paul refer to the churches and their geographic location. It also indicates the cooperation that took place between the churches. They were autonomous churches that participated with each other in the support of world missions. That is how we function to this very day.
4. **Central Idea: Paul sent greetings to the members of the church in Rome because he sincerely cared for each of them and hoped to make additional friendships in the church for the benefit of the gospel.**
5. **Application: We should cultivate meaningful friendships within our church for the sake of mutual care and for the benefit of the gospel.**

**Conclusion**

List five people who have had an impact on your Christian life. Contact one or two of them this week to let them know how much you appreciate their investment in your life. Cultivate a friendship with the people in your Sunday School class as well as within the church. Remember that we are in this together!