

H O U S E o f W I S D O M

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Romans 16 - A Holy Kiss

Romans 16:1-2: 1. *I commend unto you Phebe our sister, who is a servant^(g1249) of the church which is at Cenchrea (a port near Corinth):* 2. *That ye receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer (assistant) of many, and of myself also.* It is believed that Phebe was the bearer of this letter to the Romans, and therefore was introduced by Paul as a sister in Christ and a servant of the church of Cenchrea. Younger women were referred to as “sisters” and older women as “mothers;” Older men were called “fathers” or “elders” and the younger men “brethren.” The Greek word rendered “servant” is *diakonos*^(g1249) (dee-ak’-on-os) which can be used in the masculine or feminine, the transliteration of which gives us our modern words *deacon* and *deaconess*. In the early church, women were separate from the men. The job of a deaconess was to minister to the women in functions involving them, including teaching the younger women.

Romans 16:3-5: 3. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila (Ak-oo’-las) my helpers in Christ Jesus:* 4. *Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.* 5. *Likewise greet the church that is in their house...* When Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, they had recently left Rome because of an edict of Claudius for all Jews to depart the city (Act 18:1-2). They traveled some with Paul (Act 18:18) and therefore benefitted from his teaching. Likely, this experience encouraged them to have a church in their home and to teach others the gospel (Act 18:24-26).

In verses 6-16, Paul mentions several persons by name, likely because they were noted for their labors in the churches. In verses 21-24, he mentions names of those from whom the greetings come. The English words “greet” and “salute” are from the same Greek word (g782) which properly means *to enfold in the arms*, figurative of *to welcome*. In the west we use a handshake, sometimes hugs in closer personal relationships. This style of embrace was accompanied by a kiss, men with men, women with women, and which custom is still practiced in some countries. Today it is primarily a show of affection.

A kiss, in those early times, was a token of a mutual peace, friendship and brotherly love. Paul added the word holy to denote his intention that it express Christian sincerity and affection; and to guard against improper familiarity (cf 1Th 5:26). Gill’s commentary explains the “holy kiss” as the *Christian salutation of wishing all temporal, spiritual, and eternal happiness, to one another; and which, as it should be mutual, should be also hearty and sincere*. This is opposed to the deceptive kiss by which Joab betrayed Amasa (2Sam 20:9-10) and Judas Iscariot betrayed the Savior (Lk 22:47-48).

A kiss is figurative of obedience (Gen 41:40 see “ruled”) and being joined together (Ps 85:10). It was used to indicate people mutually joined in Baal worship (1Ki 19:18); Figuratively, Job did not want to be joined with his own works (Job 31:37). **Psalms 2:12:** *Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.* i.e. Be mutually joined to and obedient to the Son, lest He turn away from you.

Paul warns and at the same time commends the church at Rome: **Romans 16:17-19**: *17. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them.. 18. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair (elegant) speech they beguile (deceive) the hearts of the innocent (unsuspecting). 19. for your obedience did reach to all; I rejoice, therefore, as regards you, and I wish you to be wise, indeed, as to the good, and harmless as to the evil (ASV).* (alternate meaning) Doctrinal divisions can be seen in various churches today, which have resulted thousands of home churches, and even the forming of other denominations.

Who was causing divisions? The orthodox Jews considered teachers of the Christian faith to be the ones causing divisions, to the point they often persecuted them. No doubt Paul was referring more to the “Jews which believed” as teaching a perverted gospel and others which believed not (cf Act 15:5; 17:5).

As a youngster, I remember the preacher giving toe stomping talks, referred to as hellfire and brimstone sermons. Today, many sermons are more like the smooth, fair speech mentioned above, lacking little substance that will prick the heart of a sinner. I once visited a church, by invitation, that did not have a morning study. Instead, members came early and partook of coffee and donuts and visited with each other. The service consisted of singing, testimonies and a 15 minute sermon by the pastor. The substance of what the congregation (350 members) was taught was in the form of meetings in various homes during the week, led by those considered to be teachers of the word. It was the most interesting approach to church that I have ever encountered. The best way to know the substance of what they believed was to visit the home meetings.

Romans 16:20: *And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.* In Paul’s time, the people spoke Aramaic and Greek. *Satan* ^(g4567) is a transliteration of the Aramaic word *satanas*, the root of which corresponds to the Hebrew word *satan* ^(h7854), an improper noun meaning “adversary.” In the Old Testament the word is applied to human beings (2Sam 19:22) and to angels (cf Num 22:22, 32); the New Testament also applies the word to humans (Mk 8:33) and an angel of light (2Cor 11:14). Many teach that it is the prince of evil spirits. What does Paul mean by the term *bruise Satan under your feet*? It is likely an allusion to the serpent in **Genesis 3:15**: *And I will put enmity (or, hostility) between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it (seed) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* Outwardly, the “seed” is the promised Messiah; inwardly it is the truth by means of the Messiah that wounds the head of the dragon (Rv 13:3: serpent called devil, satan - Rv 12:9). We need to ensure that the deadly wound never heals and the serpent remains under our feet.

Romans 16:25-27: *25. Now to Him who is able to establish you, according to my good news, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of hidden things, in the times of the ages having been kept silent, 26. But now is manifested, also by writings of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God, being made known to all nations for obedience of faith, 27. To the only wise God be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.* (more literal to the original)

Glory be to Him who is able to establish you in love, to the only wise God and Father of Jesus Christ, amen!