

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 16:1-27.

Chapter 16 describes the fellow workers and acquaintances of the apostle Paul.

(S) **STEP 1. READ.**

Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 16:1-27 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER.**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 16. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in **Romans 16:1-2. How Christians should view women with respect to occupying a church office.** The name "Phoebe" means "bright or radiant". Letters of commendation were a necessity when a Christian travelled from one Christian church to another in which he was unknown to the Christians. Because the apostle commends Phoebe as a servant of the church in Cenchrea, she was probably the bearer of Paul's letter to the Romans to Rome. Cenchrea was one of the ports of Corinth. There was a church there and Phoebe was a "servant" of this church.

First. Phoebe was a "servant" rather than a "deaconess". Although the word "servant" is exactly the same as the word "deacon" (G: diakonos)(cf. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13), there is no need nor warrant to suppose that Phoebe occupied or exercised *an office or position* in the church! According to 1 Peter 4:10, all Christians, men and women, are required to have a service in the local church. The *service*, which Phoebe performed, was similar to those of the deacons. The ministry of the deacons is one of mercy to the poor, the sick and the desolate. The service of Phoebe was one of mercy to travellers, which is called hospitality. Paul qualifies her a "protector", "patroness", "helper" or "assistant" of himself and of many, indicating that she probably gave the kind of help travellers from East to West needed at ports, namely, *hospitality*. She could also have been a well-to-do lady, with an alert mind and heart overflowing with kindness and helpfulness. She must be compared to the women, mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 and Acts 16:15, who performed similar services. But the fact that Phoebe performed a specific service does not mean that she occupied *an office or position* as "deacon" in the church.

Second. The difference between servants and deacons. The word in the original language literally means "servant". According to Romans 12:3-8, every member of the Body of Christ has a different service or ministry (1 Cor 12:5). The different spiritual gifts, which God gives to each Christian, are for serving, building and equipping (1 Pet 4:10-11). Romans 12:7 calls one particular spiritual gift "service" and this is related to the spiritual gift of "helpings" (1 Cor 12:28). Both these spiritual gifts do *not refer to a church office, but to the ability and desire*, which the Holy Spirit gives to serve in some area. We need to distinguish between three words:

*One. Servant.* Every Christian has the responsibility to be a servant.

*Two. Service.* Some Christians have received the spiritual gift called service.

*Three. Deacon.* Only some Christians are appointed to the office of deacon.

Between A.D. 30-32 a specific need arose in the local church of Jerusalem. In the Christian service of helping the poor widows, the Greek speaking widows were for some unknown reason neglected. Therefore the church in Jerusalem officially chose seven *men* to give their attention to this specific problem and to meet this specific need. According to Acts 6:1-7, these men "served" until this need was apparently met. A little later, one of them called Philip was no longer serving as a deacon in Jerusalem, but was serving as an evangelist in Samaria.

In A.D. 62-63, the church office of deacons is only mentioned in two other local churches in the whole Bible, namely, at Philippi and Ephesus (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13). They are clearly distinguished from the church office of elders. In order to be chosen as a deacon, they had to meet certain specific qualifications. Although their tasks were not delineated, they certainly were not the leaders of the local church and they also did not perform the tasks of the elders.

Third. Were there any deaconesses in the Christian Church? Romans 16:1 uses the male form "diakonos". Some Christians want to translate "deaconess". But no where does the Bible speak of women in any church office, neither in the office of elder or the office of deacon. In 1 Timothy 3:11, the term "women like these" (G: *gunaikas* hosautos) cannot refer to the office of deacons, which would have required the term "the deaconesses" in Greek (G: *tas de*

*diakonous*). The term is also not the same as “wives of deacons”, which would also have required another term in Greek (G: *gunaikas auton / echontes*). Therefore, we must conclude that the women mentioned in 1 Timothy chapter 3 are most probably a separate group of women who exercised, *not an office, but rather a particular service* in the church at Ephesus, as 1 Timothy 5:3-16 clearly suggests.

**Fourth. Conclusion concerning women in the Christian church.** Galatians 3:28 clearly teaches that brothers and sisters are *equally children of God* through Jesus Christ. However, in Genesis chapter 1 to 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and 14, Ephesians chapter 5, Colossians chapter 3, 1 Timothy chapter 2, 3 and 5, Titus chapter 2 and 1 Peter chapter 3, *God’s plan, decree or regulation for male and female after the creation as well as after the recreation in Christ was certainly different*. Although men and women are equally precious in God’s eyes, God has assigned to men and women different functions in the marriage relationship as well as in the church relationships.

Christians must avoid two extremes: *One*. They must avoid the extreme of ordaining (appointing) women to a church office when there is no warrant for doing so in the Bible! *Two*. And they must avoid the extreme of ignoring the very important and valuable services which able, devout and alert women are able to render to the church!

(T) An important truth for me is from **Romans 16:5. How did the Christian church in Rome meet together?** The Christian church in Rome met together in several *house churches*. According to Romans 16:5, Prisca and Aquilla had a church in their house (1 Cor 16:19). This house church may not be restricted to the people of their own household (Act 10:24; 18:7-8), but must have consisted of several different families or households who met together for the various church activities in the house of Prisca and Aquilla. The fact that the church in their house is particularly mentioned shows that it did not comprise the whole Christian church at Rome. Romans 16:14-15 probably speak of two more house churches. They say, “Greet ... the brothers with them” and “Greet ... the saints with them”. These house churches were connected to the people mentioned in these verse. Hence we conclude that there were several house churches in Rome.

### (S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 16:1-17 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Question.** (16:7). Were Andronicus and Junias apostles or not?

(T) Andronicus and Junias could have been Paul’s “relatives” (Lk 1:36; Jn 18:26). They were his “fellow-countrymen” (Rom 9:3; 16:7,11,21). They were also Paul’s “fellow-prisoners” at one occasion. They are called “outstanding among the apostles”. The word ‘apostle’ means *a person sent out with a mission* and could refer to *the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ* or to *the apostles of the churches*. The apostles of Christ were sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to be the eye-witnesses of his death and resurrection, to establish the first churches among the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles and to complete the recording of the New Testament revelation. The phrase in Romans 16:7 “outstanding among the apostles” could mean that they had become Christians before the apostle Paul himself and were therefore held in high esteem by the apostles Peter, John, etc. The apostles of the churches were a broader group of people like Barnabas, Epaphroditus, Apollos, Silvanus and Timothy. They were sent out by a church with the usual task to establish other local churches through their preaching and teaching. Today we would call such people ‘missionaries of the churches’. The phrase “outstanding among the apostles” would then mean that they were held in high esteem among the missionaries of the churches.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Question.** (16:10). What does it mean to be tested and approved by God?

(S) **First. You need to be tested and approved in the area of the difficulties in life.** In Romans 16:10, Apelles is described as “tested and *approved* in Christ”. When is a Christian “tested and approved”? God especially uses difficulties, trials, temptations and sufferings to test you and develop your Christian character. When you remain true to Christ and the Christian faith amidst such difficulties, trials, temptations and sufferings you have as it were been thoroughly examined by God and passed the examination. God is then pleased with you and commends you. You should remain faithful to God amidst all the difficulties in his life. Only then does he receive God’s approval!

**Second. You need to be tested and approved by God in the area of behaviour** in the Christian meetings. In 1 Corinthians 11:19-22, Paul says, “No doubt there has to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s *approval*. When you come together, is it not the Lord’s Supper you eat?” The Lord’s Supper was celebrated in conjunction with the “love meal”, that is, a meal in which Christians of the church ate together. Some Christians were selfish, brought food and ate it without waiting for the others or without sharing with those who brought no food. Others misbehaved and even got drunk. God uses especially the Christian meetings to test your behaviour. Only when you behave as a Christian under all circumstances will you receive God’s approval!

Third. You need to be tested and approved by God in the area of spiritual training and discipline. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul uses pictures from sports to exhort Christians to put themselves under strict training and to run and fight with a clear aim in life. He says, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." To be tested and approved by God is the opposite of being disqualified by God. In order not to be disqualified by God, you must put yourself under strict spiritual training and live your life with a clear purpose. Only then will you receive God's approval!

Fourth. You need to be tested and approved by God in the area of correctly interpreting the Bible. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul exhorts Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one *approved*, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." The original literally says, "to cut the word of truth straight". Like Timothy, each church leader must do his very best to handle the truth of the Bible correctly. He may not cut the word of truth crookedly, that is, he *may not misinterpret the Bible*. This is a great responsibility for all church leaders. That is why many churches do their best to train their church leaders in correctly interpreting the Bible. Only when Christian leaders interpret the Bible correctly will they receive God's approval!

Fifth. You need to be tested and approved by God in the area of his ministry. In 2 Corinthians 10:12-18, Paul says, "We do not dare to ... compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. ... We will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us. ... We do not go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. ... It is not the one who commends himself who is *approved*, but the one whom the Lord commends." Paul had first preached the gospel in Corinth and had founded the Christian church in Corinth. Afterwards, some false teachers and false apostles came and tried to pull the Christians away from Paul to themselves. They boasted about the church of Corinth as if it were *their* ministry and commended themselves to the Christians in Corinth as being *more important apostles* than Paul. Paul simply answered that God would test the ministry of those false apostles and disapprove of them. Even if these false apostles commended themselves, it does not mean that they are commended by God. "Not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends." Christian leaders must realise that God will certainly test their ministry. God will either disqualify them or approve of them. Christian leaders must not do their ministries in accordance with their own ideas, but in accordance with the whole Bible. They must not be independent from God, but completely dependent! Only then will they receive God's approval!

**3<sup>rd</sup> Question.** (16:16). How should we interpret "the holy kiss" of Christians?

(T) Romans 16:16 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss": (G: *philemati hagio*). The New Testament shows that the Christians had the custom to greet one another with a kiss.

First. The kiss was an expression of affection. Luke 7:36-50 (45) relates that when Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner he did not give Jesus a kiss, as was the custom in those days. But a sinful woman entered and did not stop kissing the feet of Jesus! This passage shows that *affection should be expressed*, for example, by some token of affection. During the time of Jesus, the kiss was a token of affection. In our day, Christians in different countries of the world should decide what would be appropriate tokens of affection in your culture. Christians in every country of the world should express their affection towards one another in an appropriate way. For example in some cultures, Christian men give one another a bear-hug.

Second. The kiss should be a sincere expression of affection. Luke 22:47-48 relates that Judas betrayed Jesus to his enemies with a kiss. The kiss of Judas was insincere. This passage shows that the kiss or any other way of expressing Christian affection should be real and sincere.

Third. The kiss should be a holy expression of affection. In Romans 16:16 and 2 Corinthians 13:12 the apostle Paul urged Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss. The word "holy" means *separated from evil* and *set apart for God*. Therefore, a holy kiss always implies that three parties are involved: The two people kissing one another *and God* who sees and knows everything! On the one hand, the kissing may not be cold, indifferent and meaningless. On the other hand, the kissing may not be done out of wrong desires or motives. This passage shows that the kiss should be meaningful. It should symbolise that Christ's love for us is mutually shared and symbolise that we really care for one another. It is an expression of Christian love as well as an expression of commitment to help one another to be separated from evil and set apart for God.

Fourth. The kiss should be a common expression of affection. 1 Thessalonians 5:26 teaches that the holy kiss is *for all the members* of the Christian family. Christians may not omit showing affection to those members they do not like for some reason! The holy kiss should be given to every Christian without partiality. This passage shows that the kiss maintains the harmony and peace among the Christian brothers and sisters.

Fifth. The kiss should be a loving expression of affection. 1 Peter 5:14 commands Christians to greet one another with “a kiss of love”. This passage shows that the kiss is an expression of the responsibility to love one another with Christian love.

Finally. The history of the Christian kiss. There is evidence that the holy kiss passed into common Christian usage until the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the Western church. Today it is still continued in the Coptic Christian church and some Eastern churches! In some cultures the contact between the different sexes is more strictly regulated than in other cultures. The correct application of the Christian kiss would be that Christians in every country of the world should decide what would be an appropriate way to express their Christian affection to one another.

**4<sup>th</sup> Question.** (16:17-18). How should Christians relate to false teachers?

(S) Romans 16:17-18 says, “Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”

First. These false teachers were not members of the church, because Paul commends the “obedience” of the Christians in Rome to Christ (19). They were probably outsiders, travelling false teachers and propagandists. Some may have been free thinkers, who reject God’s law completely and taught that people may sin as much as they like. False teachers ‘serve their own appetites’, which means that they serve themselves instead of Christ. They are filled with an exalted opinion about themselves and love to hear themselves talk! They deceive people with their smooth talk and flattery. False teachers today still corrupt the purity and simplicity of the gospel. You can recognise them from their opposition to the Bible and its clear teachings.

Second. How Christians should treat false teachers and propagandists. Paul does not say that Christians must “oppose” these false teachers, because they might have been too strong for the ordinary members of the Christian church. Instead he says “watch out for” them all the time, that is, “notice who they are”, so that you can avoid them! The apostle Paul commands Christians to keep away from them. The apostle John commands Christians not to take false teachers into their house nor welcome them, because anyone who welcomes a false teacher into his house shares in the wicked work of the false teacher” (2 Jn 9-11).

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.** Due to shortage of time, we will skip the application and prayer.

First. This ends the study of the book of Romans. During the next two weeks, we will introduce the book of Revelation. Read through the book of Revelation once.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.