***Paul's Personal Greetings, No. 1
Romans 16:1-16
RO197-01***

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This morning, please open your Bibles to a new chapter of the book of Romans, the last chapter, chapter 16. We now begin the final portion of this book. We're looking at Romans 16:1-16. Our title is "Paul's Personal Greetings, Segment Number 1." Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome has been completed with chapter 15. The last chapter of Romans, chapter 16, deals with personal greetings to various people, a final warning about false teachers, and then a benediction. This letter was written by the apostle Paul, a man of God with a spiritual gift of the apostle. The writing of this letter was at the same time supervised by God the Holy Spirit, so that no error of fact or false doctrine was inserted into this book. Therefore, this completed epistle is truly an inerrant statement of the mind of God Himself and is to be understood literally and as absolute truth from which there is no optional exceptions on our part.

This enormously important document was thus produced by man and God, but now it must be safely transported by someone hundreds of miles from the city of Corinth to Rome to be delivered to the spiritual leaders there. We may count on the fact that Satan will do his dirty best to destroy this document enroute. He will also, over the centuries, do his best to corrupt the copying of the original manuscript before the era of the printing press. But God, as always, has preserved and protected the books of the Bible, and He has preserved and protected for us the Book of Romans so that to our day we have exactly in all practical effects that which was delivered to the Christians in Rome in the original manuscript that had been dictated by Paul to his secretary. This inerrant Scripture that we have read and that we have studied is precisely what the Christians gathering in the churches of Rome sat one day and listened as the pastor-teacher read this majestic letter on the instruction of free grace salvation to the Christians of the 1st century.

**The Introduction of Phoebe**

So, we begin this morning in Romans 16 with verses one and two. This deals with the courier. The letter has to be transported. It could not be sent by Federal Express. That was too expensive in those days. So, it had to be transported. And the fax machines were not too good, so that wasn't a good way. Somebody had to take this valuable document, this parchment, in a safe, sealed container and physically transport it across this distance to deliver it to the churches in Rome.

So, the apostle begins and he says as he closes his book, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe." The word "commend" looks like this in the Greek Bible: it's the Greek word "sunistemi," it's s u n i s t e m i, and this word literally means to "place things together." Here it denotes introducing one person to another. Furthermore, this word connotes an approval of the person that you are introducing. I'm introducing someone to you whom I commend to you in the fact that I approve of this person. This is a good person to know. This is a person you want to be acquainted with. And he calls this person a "sister," "adelphe," a d e l p h e. We don't often have this word in the New Testament. This is referring, of course, to a female in the body of Christ, a lady who is a Christian. And he uses the word "our" with her because he is referring to her in terms of the general body of believers. She is a sister of all Christians, whoever you are, wherever you are, including this congregation this morning, Phoebe was our sister and is our sister.

Her name was "Phoibe" in Greek, P h o i b e. "Phoibe," Phoebe, means bright or radiant. She was the Christian lady who evidently carried the letter from Corinth to the Christians of Rome. He identifies Phoebe in this way in order to mark her as a genuine courier from him and not an imposter because the TV evangelist con artists were operating in full force in New Testament times, just as they are today.

We do have on record a variety of so-called Scriptures which were written by individuals and then to which were attached the names of some of the apostles. These people sought to foist these off on the Christian community as if they were the very writings of Paul or a Peter or one of the other apostles in order usually to convey some particular doctrine and fad that they had. The problem is that you could not reproduce a New Testament Scripture that was a fake that was exactly the quality of the Scripture that God the Holy Spirit supervised. When man wrote alone, (You can read these yourself to this day.) you would sense, as the New Testament Christians did, that this does not have the ring of truth because the Spirit of God did not inspire it. It was not produced by Him. Furthermore, these documents inevitably have contradictions, errors of fact, errors of one kind or another, false doctrines which contradict true doctrine.

So, Paul was taking an effort here that when this woman walked in, of all things, a woman traveling in the Roman Empire by herself and perhaps a couple of servants, a woman who is unknown to the Roman Christians, it was necessary that Paul identify her and commend her as a true courier from him. She was apparently traveling on some personal business to Rome, and Paul esteemed her so highly that since she was going in that direction, he entrusted this major dissertation on Free Grace Salvation to her care. What a responsibility that must have been on her to deliver this supreme explanation of justification to the Christians in Rome. We must remember that what she carried here in the Book of Romans was the very book which would centuries later, 1500 years later, trigger the Protestant Reformation. What a tragedy it would have been had this been lost along the way or in some way through the centuries contaminated. This was no small burden to place upon this woman to be the courier of such a majestic document destined for the New Testament Scriptures.

**Technical vs. Non-technical Use of Deacon**

One of the reasons that Paul was happy to do this was because he could identify Phoebe as a "diakonos," as a "d i a k o n o s, that means a "servant." This is a person who performs some kind of service. That's its non-technical meaning.

Now, it is the same word which is used in the technical sense for the church officer that we call the deacon, because you can see that's a direct transliteration of the Greek word. The deacons which were appointed and you may read about them in the early church in Acts 6 verses 1-4 and in Philippians 1:1, and in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, where you have details given of the qualifications for a deacon, the kind of person he has to be in order for congregation to be willing to appoint him to the office of Deacon. The deacons were the people who handle the material business of the church. They supervise the material structure of the church organization and they have to be godly men, men who were not only saved, but men who had some spiritual insights and perceptions.

So, Phoebe here is described by this word, Deacon, but not in its technical sense of a church officer. This is used in the sense of one who is a servant of the Lord, its general meaning. We know that because in Acts 6:3 it very explicitly says that deacons must be men. In 1 Timothy 3:8, where it gives the qualifications for a person to be appointed by the church to the office of Deacon, it is very explicitly says they must be men. So, Phoebe was not a deaconess in the technical sense of a church officer as part of the "Diakonet." And it is not really a good idea to refer to women as deaconesses because it's confusing, it suggests that they are church officers.

There are some churches that have simply taken this word for word where it was translated directly from the Greek as deaconess, and they've assumed that women and men can be in the office of the "Diakonet." But that is contradicted by other Scriptures.

Phoebe perform then some specific ministry in her local church congregation as a servant of the Lord, and she was indeed a member of a local church, the "ekklesia," e k k l e s i a. This word here is used in terms of a local church. "I commend to you [I highly recommend to you,] our sister [in the Lord,] Phoebe, who is a servant of the church, which is at Cenchrea." And this therefore is referring to church in the sense of a local church, not in the sense of the church as the universal church, which is the body of Christ, which includes all believers, whatever their religious or denominational backgrounds may be.

Phoebe's church was located in Cencheria. The city of Corinth is on a peninsula. Therefore, it had an eastern and a western port, a seaport. This was the eastern seaport of Corinth and it was the port which looked out on Asia on the Adriatic Sea. The apostle Paul, we read in Acts 18:18, sailed from Cenchrea, from Corinth to Ephesus. In the city of Cenchrea, as always, there was not one church congregation. I hope you understand that by now. You must not think the way we think about a church congregation. This kind of a structure in which we meet this morning was unthinkable and totally unknown for at least the first 250 years of the Christian era. People did not meet in large buildings, in temples, in structures called churches. In fact, this word "ekklesia" is never used in the New Testament of a building. It is only used of congregations who are a visible representation of the invisible universal body of Christ. So, this lady came from the sea port city of Cenchrea in which she was a servant of the Christians in that city and probably no doubt of one of her own local church.

Each of these churches met in somebody's home, so they were called house churches and each of them had a pastor-teacher elder, one elder for one church. The confusion has come down from misreading Scripture when it says 'the elders of Cenchrea,' for example, that that means there was one church and they were all in one church, all these elders were officers in one church structure: or the elders of Ephesus, as if it were one church and they were all elders in the same church. When you come to the Book of 1 Timothy, Chapter 3, which gives you the qualifications for a pastor-teacher elder bishop (All those are interchangeable terms.), it begins with a singular, the elder bishop pastor-teacher, one man, must be. Interestingly enough, you get down to verse 13 of 1 Corinthians 3, and it begins speaking about the deacons and it immediately uses the deacons in the plural because they're supposed to be several deacons in a church congregation.

So, what we have here is a woman who is not an official church officer as a deacon, but was a servant indeed in a local church. Women were very prominent in New Testament church ministries. They were restricted in certain ways and that must be observed today. And is the women's movement, the feminist movement, ever fighting against these restrictions? One of them is in 1 Timothy 2:12. 1 Timothy 2:12 says "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to be quiet." In the context, Paul is talking about women, wives, being instructed how they should dress, how they should act, and how they should conduct themselves as godly women. The apostle Paul makes it very clear from verse 13 that this was a divine order. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. Furthermore, Adam was not deceived by the devil, he deliberately chose to follow Satan even after he saw what horrible consequences it had done to his wife Eve. But Eve, because of her temperament, as women are by nature more sensitive, nurturing and emotionally oriented, Satan was able to deceive her. So, the apostle Paul says God's order is this - men lead in spiritual things, men lead in everything. Women do not become president of the United States. Women do not become vice president of the United States. Women do not sit on city councils in authority over men. Women are not in positions of authority in any respect over men. Now, you can say 'I don't like that,' and that's OK. I'm just called to your attention to the fact that God's order for maximum human happiness and maximum human progress restricts women from being in authority over men. That includes in the military. There's nothing so wonderful, like having a second lieutenant leading you in combat in high heels and a mini skirt under her uniform.

There's another restriction that logically comes from this. We have that 1 Timothy 3:1, and that is that women do not fill the office of pastor-teacher elder in the congregation. Paul says "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer (or Bishop, or pastor-teacher, the same thing), it is a fine work he desires to do." So, it is very clear and certainly it is making it more clear if you read the qualifications. One of the things the elder bishop is supposed to have is only one wife. Now only in you know what kind of a group would a woman have a wife. But in the realm of normal human beings, for a pastor to have a wife, he must obviously be a male. It doesn't mean he has to have a wife, but if he is married, he should have only one wife. That doesn't mean one wife at a time either. He cannot change her in for a new model when her paint begins to peel and she begins to creak and so on.

So, the Bible is very explicit about these requirements for the P/T. When a church recognizes that and recognizes that the congregation is the ruling authority in a church situation and that the pastor-teacher, once appointed, is the executive head of that congregation, that they hold responsible for supervising its ministry and teaching it and carrying out the work for its best interests on the policies of the congregation, then you have a smooth operating organization. And that's what the local church is, it is an organization. It is not an organism like the Universal Body of Christ is. It's an organization that has to have lines of authority to function properly. And then you cannot have a dictator arise: a committee of elders is the most powerful dictatorial setup in the world. That's why the communist rule by committee. That's why the Roman triumvirate of ancient world ruled by committees. When they had 3 powerful men ruling, you couldn't bring them down; whereas a single ruler cannot be dictatorial and get beyond the bounds of his authority without easily being brought under control.

So, women were indeed prominent in the New Testament work, but they were not permitted to exercise authority over men and they were not permitted to be pastors of the local church congregation. But they did minister, as we know, to Jesus himself. They ministered to the apostles. They ministered to God's people. And they have done this throughout the centuries of Christian history. But some of the all-time great missionaries we have had as Christians have been women in the field. And of course, women are particularly suited to certain areas of the local church ministries. Undoubtedly this is the kind of thing that Phoebe was engaged in.

**Paul Asks for Phoebe's Worthy Treatment**

The apostle Paul goes on and says after having identified this outstanding woman, I introduce to you our sister, Phoebe, she is a Christian. She is a servant of the local church in Cenchrea. I am asking you to "receive her." This word "receive" here connotes "accepting her." When she arrives for your personal benefit, you are to actively receive her. This word is in the Greek in the subjunctive mood, which means that it's a potential act and that there might be some Christians who might not be so kindly disposed toward Phoebe. So Paul says I want to make it clear that when this lady arrives, she is to be given VIP treatment by all of you.

And that I want you to receive her "in the Lord." That refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the Roman Christians are to view Phoebe as a sister in Christ. It also connotes receiving Phoebe as people who themselves are in the Lord. See, it goes both ways. I want you to receive Phoebe as a sister who is in Christ, and I want you to act as people who are in Christ toward her. It goes both ways. So, receive Phoebe as one who is a Christian and receive her as you who are Christians is the idea.

He says I want you to receive her in a manner that is "worthy." It's a Greek word "axios." You receive her in the Lord "in a manner worthy of." It's one word in the Greek. It's the Greek word, "axios," a x i o s. This word connotes "to be consistent with some standard." The standard here is that of saints or holy ones in Gods family. So, what it connotes here is both treating Phoebe as is befitting to one who is a saint of God in the family of God, and also for the Christians in Rome to be acting themselves as saints of God toward her. What he asks them to do is to "help her." The Greek word looks like this "paristemi," p a r i s t e m i, and "paristemi" means "to stand by." So, the idea is to stand by Phoebe and be ready to help her. Again, this is subjunctive, something you might not be inclined to do this, this is potential. But Paul says I hope that that will not be a problem with you, that you stand by her, that you help her "in whatever matter." This is a way of expressing here the third class condition in the Greek, which means maybe she will have a need, maybe she won't. But if she does have any kind of a need, please stand by her and be ready to assist her in whatever way you can. After all, this woman is in strange surroundings in Rome. She needs Christian friends. She needs some hospitality as she gets settled in Rome. So, she is to be received with courtesy and affection and to be assisted with anything that she needs. Provide for her is what Paul is saying.

And he says I'll tell you why I'm suggesting this. He says "for she herself has also been a helper of many." The word helper is "prostatis," p r o s t a t i s. This word in the Greek language means a guardian of some kind. Isn't that interesting? We would call her a benefactress or a patroness. Phoebe herself exercised concern and help toward other Christians. On many occasions, she has in the past helped Christians, she now deserves that same kind of treatment. She perhaps was a widow, perhaps an unmarried woman, but she seems to be a woman of means. Apparently she used her wealth, like Lydia did with Paul, to meet the immediate legitimate needs of God's people and of the work of the Lord in Cenchrea. That's the great and wonderful thing when you are a person of some financial means, that you now stand in the marvelous, advantageous position which most Christians do not, of being able to see a need in the Lord's work and to be able to step in and cover the costs. That is one of the great callings that some Christians have. You have the means to step in and cover the costs. Paul himself, he says, found himself on occasion the beneficiary of this godly protector, of this godly benefactor. Phoebe, thus, was a woman who in the past had used her financial abilities and reserves to perform distinguished and valuable service to God's people.

And Paul loved her. He says you will love her. Most important of all, God loved her. God the Holy Spirit loved her so much that he memorialized her in this Scripture forever because of her devoted service to the Lord. This is a wonderful thing to have a Christian who is this kind of a servant of God that you can count upon, that you can depend upon, and one who will sacrifice for other people, not one who just piles it up for himself. Here was a woman who knew that what she had was a means for storing her treasures in heaven and executing the work of the Lord on this earth.

**Paul's Greetings to Friends in Rome**

So, with this introduction of the courier and the commendation of her, the apostle Paul begins in Romans 16:3-16 to send greetings to several friends who are in the city. He begins with "greet." This is the word "aspazomai," a s p a z o m a i. This means "say hello," and it connotes saluting somebody in a friendly way. At some point in time, the apostle Paul says I want you to greet cordially somebody he's going to mention. I should tell you that this is a command in the Greek. This is not an invitation. Why don't you folks be nice like this? It is a direct command, something that should be done.

And what he mentions first and up front is two people who obviously were very close to him, that he had a very deep friendship with, a husband and wife team named Prisca and Aquila. They are mentioned first and foremost. The word "Prisca" we often are acquainted with this in the Bible by its diminutive form, Priscilla. Priscilla is the diminutive form. Somebody is named John. When you want to use his name in an affectionate way, you use a diminutive form. You call him Johnny. So, Prisca was her name, but people who were close to her and friendly as Paul here was often referred to her also as Priscilla.

Paul knows this lady very well, and she was probably Jewish since she was married to a Jewish man. Her husband, Aquila, was a Jew from Pontus in Asia Minor. This husband and wife team are named several times, as you know, in the New Testament. They were great travelers. They travel widely in the Roman Empire and they first met Paul on an occasion when the Roman Emperor Claudius set in motion a program of anti-Semitism in Rome. He ordered all Jews to be expelled from the city of Rome. Priscilla and Aquila, who were in Rome, were expelled. In the process of that happening, that's how they met Paul. Acts 18:2 we read "And he [Paul] found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. So he came to them." They discovered that they both had the same vocation. They all 3 were tent makers. So, with this common skill, they fell in with one another. We don't know whether Paul led Prisca and Aquila to salvation, but in any case, a deep friendship developed between them.

And Paul calls them his fellow workers: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ." This refers to a person who labors with another in some task. Here, they were fellow workers together in Christ. So, he's referring to the fact that they joined him in his Christian missionary enterprises. Paul himself stayed in the home of Prisca and Aquila while he was ministering in Corinth. In Acts 18:3, Paul says "because he was of the same trade [tent makers], he [Paul] stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent makers." Prisca and Aquila went with Paul from the city of Corinth to Ephesus during Paul's second missionary journey. Paul himself sailed on to Ceasarea while they remained in Ephesus. Acts 18, beginning at verse 18, we read about that. "And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. And when they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, 'I will return to you again if God wills,' he set sail for Ephesus." So, he went on to Ephesus, left behind Priscilla and Aquila. Paul promised to return, which indeed he did. He returned and stayed for 3 years. You can read about that in Act 19. Prisca and Aquila probably laid the groundwork for Paul's later return ministry.

Now while awaiting Paul's return to Ephesus, Prisca and Aquila ran across an Alexandrian Jew who was a Christian, who was an itinerant preacher, a traveling preacher. When they listened to him preach, they noticed a couple of things about him. He had a lot of eloquence and he had great learning. But they also noticed something else. They noticed that the gospel he was preaching was the gospel that the apostles of Jesus had been preaching, the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel that John the Baptist was preaching, the gospel that called upon the Jewish people to repent so that the Savior would be able to institute the Messianic Kingdom. And they were appalled that this man was so doctrinally behind times that he did not understand the Doctrine of the Grace of God. He was still preaching the good news, repent and the Kingdom of Heaven will be set up, and you repent by accepting the Messiah Savior who has now arrived. So, they looked at one another, and Prisca, who seemed to be a very energetic type of lady, we get that feeling about her, suggested probably to Aquilla, 'let's invite him to dinner.' So they did, they invited Apollos to their home, and there they gave him a crash course on the doctrine of Free Grace Salvation. And we read about that in Acts 18:24. "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John. [He wasn't teaching the wrong things, false things, but he wasn't going far enough.] He began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him," and so on. So, what they did was took this man while they're waiting for Paul to return. Let's read verse 26. "and he began to speak out boldly ... and they explained the Word of God more accurately." They took him and they said, 'here's what you have not understood, you've not gone far enough,' and they brought him up to date on the doctrine of salvation by the free grace of God.

Paul returned to Ephesus and stayed there for 3 years then, probably building on this ministry that they had established. And it was a great honor for Priscilla and Aquila to be called the fellow workers of the apostle Paul: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, they're my fellow workers." It was a great honor for them to be identified in this way.

**Quality Christian Workers**

But Paul goes on to identify them even more in verse 4 he says referring to them "who." And this is a Greek word that gives us a little insight here. It's the Greek word "hostis," h o s t i s, and "hostis" refers to "quality." It means the "kind of people." He says, I'll tell you something more about Prisca and Aquila, they are the kind of people who risk their own necks. The word "risk" here means to "lay down." It connotes some kind of hazard that these people were ready to undergo and what they did was risk their own necks. The picture here, the analogy, is putting your head down on the executioner's block, ready for his sword to come down to chop off your head. On some occasion, Prisca and Aquila had in some way hazarded their own lives to protect the life of Paul. It may have happened on the occasion when Paul saved the little girl who was possessed by demons, who had been fortunetelling and who had been the source of the prosperity of the Diana images that the silversmiths in Ephesus were making. And you can read about that in Acts 19:21-24. The result was an enormous riot in the cities when the silversmiths found that this little girl no longer had contact with the spirit world and that it was undermining their selling of the images of Diana of the Ephesians. Paul may have, on that occasion, had his life so hazarded that Priscilla and Aquila came in and did something at the jeopardy of their own lives to save his life. Well, of course, Paul says, "Not only do I give thanks for this service by them, but also do all the churches of the gentiles, because obviously if the apostle Paul had been killed at Ephesus, there was a great deal of instruction and knowledge that he had that could not have been transmitted. And so, he says of them that he gives thanks. That is, he expresses his appreciation to God for friends like Prisca and Aquila. And the gentile churches were grateful as well.

Then he says, furthermore, he calls upon them in verse 5 to "greet the church that is in their house." There in their house in Rome, there was another house church. Again, we have the emphasis here on the "oikos," o i k o s. The home of Priscilla and Aquila in Rome was one of the meeting places for part of the Christian community in that city. The word church here, again, referring to the congregation, not to the building and Prisca and Aquila were people of some financial means, evidently, and that's why they had a house that was suitable in size for the Christians to gather in worship.

The word "in" is interesting here. Let me show you that. "Greet the church that is in their house." It's not the ordinary word for "in" that we have in Greek; it's the preposition "kata," which is a word that indicates pieces so that when he says, "the church that is in their house," this preposition tells us that it's one piece of many other churches that are all around the city of Rome. So again you have this principle reiterated that people did not meet in one church with a body of elders ruling, but they met in many house churches, each with its own Elder-teacher guiding.

Well, obviously, the apostle Paul here reflects a great deal of deep emotional attachment to these people. The very fact that Paul elsewhere uses the diminutive with this lady calling her Priscilla. We might call her Prissy or something like that. But you don't do that to people who are not very close to you. If they're close to you, then you talk to them in that kind of a close and friendly way. And these people were very close to the Apostle Paul. He spends more time sending a greeting to them than anybody else here that follows. He had obviously an attachment to these two because they were loyal supporters in his missionary ministry.

How different that his experience was with them, for example, compared to flaky John Mark. In Acts 13:13 we read about how John Mark found missionary work too demanding on that first missionary tour. So, he just ups and leaves in the middle. I mean, that is really a flaky type of character. Once in a while, we've had people who come to summer camp and they get upset about something that isn't going their way and they go home. Now, in summer camp we have a structure where everybody's important. We have a structure where things are constantly rotating with the human lives of these children. All of a sudden you pull out one piece of the personnel and you've got a big hole. We have actually had people, they're no longer with us. They're the flaky type that eventually, fortunately, thank God, go off into the great beyond, into the black hole of the flakes that we never see them again. But I know what this would be. I can appreciate the apostle Paul saying, boy, I could always count on Prisca and Aquila to be there, not like John Mark who, when I really needed him, deserted us, just shoved off for home, said 'I'm going to go see my momma. This is too hard. I didn't think it was ..., this is no fun.'

When the second missionary journey came along, Paul's partner, Barnabas, the uncle of John Mark says, 'Let's take Johnny with us.' And Paul says 'Over my dead body. You know what he did to us! You want us to get out there in the field again? You know what it is to be out in the field. It's just not that easy to get around. He's going to find work is too hard and shove off again.' Well, Paul was very adamant about this, and so was Barnabas. So, that's what split the two of them. They each formed a new team and went on their own. But it is terrible to have somebody that doesn't stand by that you can't count on when you're doing the Lord's work. We know that to this day.

Or how about Paul's experience with Demas? You read about Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10, where Demas, who is a close member of the team, suddenly became so attracted to the world. He had never seen the great metropolitan centers of the New Testament world. Now he's traveling with Paul and seeing something that this farm boy had never seen before. And where he'd been a great servant of the Lord, Paul says he fell in love with Satan's system of glamor of this world and he's deserted us.

Or the conflict he had with Barnabas in Acts 15:39... it's terrible to have to have that kind of conflict over how to do the Lord's work with people that you're joined to in Christ. Or how about Peter, Galatians 2:11-14, one of the more extended declarations of Paul. Paul, here he is talking to the first Pope. And Peter, the first Pope would not sit down and eat with Gentiles because some Jewish Christians said 'we don't associate with Gentiles, (which Jews didn't in the Mosaic Order,) and we will not sit down and eat with them.' Boy, Peter got scared off and he says, 'Hey, Peace Brothers.' And he did all the stuff that Popes do. Then he sat down and he wouldn't eat with the Gentile Christians. Peter said to him, 'You're really something Peter. Here you are a Jew. You can't even keep all of the regulations of the Mosaic Law. You couldn't even live as a Jew is supposed to live. I couldn't. None of us could. Here we've got these Christians. We've got the new order where we have freedom in Christ, and you let those jerks, those Judaizers keep you from sitting down and eating with a fellow Christian because he's a Gentile. Peter that's wrong.' I want to remind you that he didn't say this to Peter on the side after the service. He stood up in church and said it. Now what kind of a way is that to talk about the Pope? I mean, Peter get the picture real quick.

Paul was fed up with anybody who was undermining the free grace of God. You can imagine what he'd have to say today in certain quarters. Paul had no patience. On the other hand, that wasn't a pleasant duty for him. That's never any fun to have to wring somebody out, to call them to task because of their spiritual conduct.

So, when he thought about Priscilla and Aquila, his heart was filled with overwhelming gratitude to God that he had such people that he knew he could always count. Every time he came to church, he knew that they would be there. Every time a ministry was to be performed that they were responsible, he knew it would be done. He knew he could count on them, and he knew that they weren't going to check out because they didn't happen to feel too well or they wanted to stay home and do something else when it was time to be there for a ministry. Paul says 'I don't know about the rest of them, but Prissy and Aquilla, they're going to be there. I know that they will be on the job. I can count on them.' No wonder this man was so deeply in love with these two people. And he gives a major portion of his greetings to remembering these who had been such fellow workers, such soldiers in the Lord with him over so many years.

As we continue in the rest of the letter, you will see that he then gives very short little greetings to a lot of people in a variety of ways and then leads to the climax of the closing of his book. But this is a man who by experience knew what it was to have Christians he can count on. How many of us, by our own experience indeed know that very thing? We hope that maybe both Phoebe, and Prisca and Aquila will inspire all of us to be that kind of true workers and soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, that when we enter the spiritual combat's we're not going to look around and find that you've become AWOL at the moment that we need you, that you're not going to be checking out because of secondary trivial things that you will weep about in eternity before Christ and wonder why you could have been so foolish as to squander yourself. You realize how many lives are sent down the drain for economic reasons, how many lives are wasted because of some economic advantage over against serving the living God and being one who is dependable to be counted upon? I want to tell you folks, you're all going to check out sooner or later. The real life and the real values are all before us. What those will be are determined by whether we are Phoebe types, whether we are Prisca and Aquila type, or whether we are the flakey John Mark and the deserting Demas'. Make your pick. Make your choice.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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