

“UNITY IN DIVERSITY” Romans 16:1-16

Romans 16, is for most readers, the least interesting chapter in this epistle. To many it is like reading a telephone directory of dead people! However, Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*” So if there is profit in all Scripture, we need to consider what lessons we can learn from this passage. This long list of greetings to various persons gives us a snapshot of the early church. It will also tell us much about the character of the great apostle. This window into his soul reveals his:

- (1) INTEREST IN OTHERS
- (2) PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS
- (3) THANKFULNESS FOR OTHERS

(1) INTEREST IN OTHERS

The first thing this list reveals is Paul’s interest in others. Paul was a great theologian, scholar, church planter, and defender of the faith. Often a man like this tends to be somewhat remote from people. However, the Apostle Paul was a man who loved Christ and the saints of God. He was not “ivory tower theologian” who distanced himself from others in the Body of Christ. Paul was a man who loved greatly the saints of God and was loved greatly in return. Writing to the Galatians he gives us this insight, “*for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me*” (Gal. 4:15b). The saints there had such a love for Paul that they would have given their eyes for him if it could possibly have helped him. Paul was a man whose primary focus was not on buildings or budgets but people. Writing to the Philippians this clearly comes forth, “*Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved*” (Philp. 4:1). Right doctrine is not to be viewed in isolation, but is to lead to right relationships with others.

In these 16 verses to the Romans, Paul sends greetings to 28 persons. The amazing thing is that this is a city that he had never visited. How many here could remember 28 names from another church in a city they have visited - never mind one they had never been to? This not only gives us an example of Paul’s great memory but even more important it likely reveals a group of individuals he was praying for. This man had an incredibly busy life yet he took time to think about others. He had the perfect excuse for forgetting names and details about people. However, being out of sight was not out of mind for Paul.

DIVERSITY OF CHURCH - There is a great diversity in this eclectic church in Rome. We can see:

- (1) Many women, couples, and even a mother and a son. Foolish writers claim that Paul was a misogynist yet they fail to note how he honoured and respected the women who helped him in his ministry. We should also note the vital work they played. Paul constantly brings up their incredible and fervent efforts in the church. It is also inspiring to see families working together in this local church. That should be the aim of every Christian home.
- (2) Jews/Gentiles – This church was made up of the two major racial groups. He mentions his Jewish kinsfolk such as Andronicus and Junia (v. 7). By contrast, Phoebe (v1-2) has a name derived from a Gentile pagan god.
- (3) Slaves and Masters – the church had a diverse mixture of social status of the rich and the abject poor. Amplias, Urbane, Stachys and Apelles (v8-10) were all common slave names - some Roman, some Greek. By contrast, Aristobulus, Herodion, and Narcissus (v10-11) seem to have some connection to the imperial household in Rome.

(4) Diverse ministries - Some like Aquila and Priscilla were Bible teachers who hosted churches in their home (v3), whereas others like Mary were people who “*bestowed much labour on us*” (v6). Some like Andronicus and Junia had even spent time with Paul in prison (v7).

The diversity of the church at Rome proves Paul’s point in Romans 1:16 that the gospel truly is, “*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*” It also proves that this epistle is written to the ordinary people as well as to the scholars. Most of these people are never mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. Yet, they clearly were significant to Paul. He not only knew their names but many details about their lives. Every believer, whether rich or poor, was an honoured member of God’s family to Paul. He lived out what he taught the Galatians, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:28). This impartial spirit to all is the same the Master who took time to witness to the needs of the wealthy Jewish ruler, Nicodemus in John 3 as well as the despised Samaritan adulteress in John 4. Paul is interested in all because God is interested in all! Paul instructed the Roman believers to welcome Phoebe “*ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints*” (v2a). In the same manner we say to every true saint of God, “welcome in Jesus’ Name.” This is Christ’s church and Who He invites we have no right to despise or reject. Save for rightful church discipline, to reject or neglect to warmly welcome a true believer is a sin. It is not mere social courtesy but a tangible expression that we are all brothers and sisters with the same Father. Paul emphasizes repeatedly in this passage that these believers are in “*the Lord.*” Hence, any visitor that darkens the door of this sanctuary may come as a stranger, but they should leave as a friend.

(2) PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS

Paul was not only a man interested in others but he was also a man who worked with others. He was a pastor who fully recognized the gifts in others and sought to partner with other believers in local churches. He was not a maverick doing his own thing independent of the church. In Romans 12:4-5 he reminded us of our interdependence, “*For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*”

We should note that this man was blessed with more natural abilities than anyone here. As an apostle he had apostolic sign gifts that we do not have and could pen 14 epistles of the NT under divine inspiration. Yet, he still recognized that he needed to co-labour with others. How much more do we need to do so today! Often we hear said of certain people, even pastors and elders, that, “they cannot work with others.” That is far removed from the Christian model. There is no such thing as a one-man team! God is interested in all and God can use all. Just look at the diversity in the apostolic band in terms of temperament, academic background, social status etc. Who would have thought that Peter the uneducated brash fisherman from rustic Galilee could work with Paul the scholarly educated Jew from the cultured Gentile city of Tarsus. Yet God molded these diverse individuals to be a mighty instrument for the unprecedented advancement of His kingdom. The mixed cosmopolitan church at Rome is a classic example of what God wants His church to represent. This is what it will be in heaven with, “*a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands*” (Rev. 7:9). Yet despite their diversity, they worked together in a beautiful harmony. At the beginning of this epistle Paul records, “*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*” (Romans 1:8).

This is unity in diversity. Churches need the spectrum of personalities and diverse gifts of people like Phoebe, Aquila, Priscilla, and Junia etc. Unity without diversity is merely uniformity and diversity without unity is anarchy. But *unity in diversity* is God’s ordained plan for His church. We are all to work together for the glory of God here in this church. There is room for every saint of God to labour together in this corner of the vineyard. We are all companions – not competitors! We all have a tendency to judge too quickly the effectiveness of others and by using the wrong

criteria. Even the godly and mature Samuel was guilty of this. Despite the fact that he had seen the abject failures in the outwardly attractive King Saul, he fell into the same trap when he went to the family of Jesse in 1 Samuel 16. As he looked at the outward appearance of Eliab, Samuel was impressed and said, “*Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.*” However, the Lord immediately rebuked him for his erroneous judgment, “*But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*”

Let God call and send Who He wants to our local church – that is His job. None of us are indispensable. The Church of Jesus Christ has been here for centuries before we came into the world and, if the Lord tarries, will be here centuries after we are gone.

(3) THANKSGIVING FOR OTHERS

Paul shows us not only is he interested in others and partners with others but also that he is thankful for the labours of others. One of the weaknesses in many churches is to under-appreciate or take for granted the labours of co-workers. Paul did not say “they are serving the Lord so I don’t have to thank them.” He knows that a kind word of appreciation is a helpful encouragement to the human soul. It should be noted that he does this when these fellow workers are *alive* and not when they are *dead*. Too many words of appreciation are spoken at the graveside of those who are no longer around to be blessed by them. A word of encouragement may be what some struggling saint desperately need today.

Paul sets forth in great detail his appreciation for their different acts of service. He expresses his thankfulness for Phoebe as, “*she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also*” (v2b). The word “*succourer*” means literally to stand near or beside. It has the idea that she placed herself at the disposal or service of another. This wonderful lady was not passive but proactive in her serving. She was a blessing not just to the famous church leaders like Paul, but “*a succourer of many.*” Phoebe was truly the feminine equivalent of Barnabas.

Paul also mentioned this lovely couple, Aquila and Priscilla as, “*my helpers in Christ Jesus.*” He tells us of their sacrifice, “*Who have for my life laid down their own necks*” and how he appreciates them, “*unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles*” (v4). Paul also notes others who assisted him “*Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ*” (v9) and those who ministered to him, “*Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us*” (v6). Interestingly, this Greek expression “*much labour*” has the idea of great effort and exertion, to the point of sweat and exhaustion. She was like George Whitefield who cried, “Lord I am weary in Thy work but not of Thy work.”

The apostle is unashamed to express his love and thanksgiving for these saints. This is not the formal giving of thanks by a cold professional. The word “*beloved*” is used four times by Paul in these few verses. The early church was full of love one for the other. Just read the loving words in John’s epistles. Note also how Peter closed the final chapter of his life with this loving tribute to Paul, “*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you*” (2 Peter 3:15). The early church was diverse in racial background, social status, temperament, academic ability etc. They even had different areas to serve within the body of Christ. Yet, they loved one another and sought to work in unity with one another for the glory of God. So, why do we struggle so much with this today? Why do we think that this goal is impossible?

CONCLUSION

Let me leave you with some practical lessons from Romans 16:

(1) The Gospel can flourish in any background. Just look at the diversity in the church at Rome. It also has the power to keep and reach further. Paul mentions a man who was his first convert in

Achaia many years before, “*Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ*” (v5). This man was still going on with God. Vines can grow for hundreds of years bearing good fruit continually. Paul’s branch of Christ’s vine is still fruitful after almost 2,000 years! True converts are like Epaenetus “*unto Christ.*” They are not the converts of any man.

(2) Paul had a lot of praiseworthy things to say about these church members in Rome. If he were writing about you in one of his epistles, what would he say? Be careful how you answer that! In Romans 15 a measure of our spiritual temperature is our giving and our praying. Here it is our partnership, thanksgiving, and our love for one another. How are you getting along?

(3) These saints of God laboured fervently in mostly unseen, background roles, which were essential to the life and work of the early church. Often it goes unnoticed and unappreciated by men. But the Lord sees and notes it all. The world labours to have their names inscribed on great monuments and buildings, which one day will crumble into the dust. But we need to labour to have an epitaph like this lady Phoebe “*a succourer of many*” or this man Urbane “*our helper in Christ*” (v9).

(4) If someone as busy as Paul could take the time to express his gratitude to those who have been a blessing to him, why cannot you? Make a list of those who have helped you and pray for them. Send them a note of encouragement and appreciation. There are no robots in the church. People work better when they feel appreciated and loved. Don’t put it off. Tomorrow may be too late.

(5) This was not a church of spiritual spectators at Rome. This church had unsung heroes who were fully committed to the work of God there and in surrounding areas. They did not engage in “church politics” but had willing hands and loving hearts. Couples like Aquila and Priscilla and women like Phoebe and Mary were sold out for the Lord. How committed are you to the Lord’s work here?

“EVIL MEN IN GOD’S VINEYARD” (Romans 16:17-20)

The Apostle Paul in Romans 16:1-16 gave a wonderful example of extending Christian love and fellowship to fellow saints. However, in v17-20 he reminds the believers at Rome that not everyone is to be welcomed into the fellowship of the saints. Counterfeit believers propagating false beliefs are to be separated from. Paul’s love for the saints at Rome causes him to protect them from false and divisive persons. These persons distort and contradict the faith he has taught them in this epistle. Paul has had bitter personal experience in dealing with evil men in God’s vineyard. So, he describes carefully such “church-wreckers” in terms of their:

(1) MANNER (2) MOTIVE (3) METHOD

(1) MANNER (v17) - The apostle here describes first the manner of these counterfeit believers who come into the church. He tells us they are, “*them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.*” These unwelcome intruders are not immature believers who are divisive because of their personal convictions. We are commanded to receive such persons in chapter 14. No, this is a far more serious intrusion of people who cause:

- (i) **DIVISIONS** – these are people who deliberately divide the local church.
- (ii) **OFFENCES** – this word translated “*offences*” is *skandalon* in the Greek has the idea of stumbling blocks or hindrances. These are people who cause the saints of God to fall into sin by their example, words or deeds.

These divisions and stumbling blocks caused by these false disciples is a direct result of them challenging and undermining the truth of the gospel, “*contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.*” This “*doctrine*” is simply the body of truth that Paul has taught them in the preceding 15 chapters of this epistle. Now, we need to know this doctrine well in order to compare properly the real and the counterfeit.

ACTIVE OR PASSIVE? Paul gives specific instruction in how we should deal with such persons. Once we recognise them, we are not to be simply passive towards them. We are not to piously shrug our shoulders and say, “if they are not of God then He will deal with them.” Paul tells us we must first “*mark*” them. This Greek word carries the idea of looking at or observing with intensity. It is in the present continuous tense to indicate that we must be habitually watchful for these people. It is impossible to separate from a false teacher if you cannot recognise him! Therefore, every man must have his teachings judged by the Scriptures. Once these counterfeit believers are identified, then the apostle gives us the command in the imperative mood to “*avoid them.*”

So, we are not to be passive or indifferent here. We are to actively watch for such persons and separate from them. Now, please note that it is not just a separation from their false teachings but from the person. Some foolish believers think they can separate the person from their beliefs and remain in fellowship with heretics. They say, “He is my friend and brother in Christ. We just disagree in our beliefs on justification or the inspiration of the Bible.” However, you don’t need a PhD to understand what Paul says, “*avoid them.*” That means you don’t fellowship with them, invite them to your pulpit, recommend their books, and even debate or dialogue with them. Don’t encourage them in any way!

In other epistles Paul writes about the need for biblical separation. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul unfolds this, “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof:*

from such turn away.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Paul makes it clear, “*from such turn away.*” The problem is not in understanding what Paul has said here, the problem is in obeying it. The Apostle John also teaches separation (2 John 1:9-11). Men of God have always practiced biblical separation from those who betray the gospel.

(2) MOTIVE (v18a) - Now, having identified the characteristics of these wicked individuals, Paul then reveals their motivation. In other words, why are there people like this in the church? He explains somewhat colourfully that, “*For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.*” These counterfeit believers are enslaved to their own fleshly lusts and desires. They crave things such as money, position, power, influence, and recognition. Ultimately, it is the desire to exalt self. But the Christian life is one of self-denial and the crucifixion of self. The life of the godly is to walk a different path. MacArthur puts it well,

“No matter how seemingly sincere and caring false teachers or preachers may appear to be, they are never genuinely concerned for the cause of Christ or for His church. They are driven by self-interest and self-gratification—sometimes for fame, sometimes for power over their followers, always for financial gain, and frequently for all of those reasons. Many of them enjoy pretentious and luxurious lifestyles, and sexual immorality is the rule more than the exception. Many false teachers devote their lives to the study of Scripture, but because they have never trusted in Christ for salvation and because they view the Bible as man’s ideas about God rather than God’s revelation to man, they distort His Word and twist it to fit their own sinful predispositions.”

The most obvious example of this self-serving preachers are those who promote the health and wealth prosperity heresy. They openly boast in their extravagances. However, these are the easy applications. There are many false believers in the church who behave more modestly. They come across as sincere, zealous, and humble. They are more like Judas and Demas who can fit in without raising suspicion. But underneath they have the wrong motives. Only time truly reveals their real character. Remember, almost all the prominent cults, such as the Mormons or the Jehovah Witnesses, were started by men emanating from an orthodox Christian background. These charismatic false teachers then drew away followers after them from mainline Christianity.

(3) METHOD (v18b) - The apostle Paul not only warns his readers about the manner and motives of these evil men who seek to rampage in God’s vineyard, but he also describes their method. He tells us that they, “*by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*” The old serpent deceived Eve in the garden with a few subtle sentences. He did not come as an enemy but as a friend. His disciples are empowered with the same cunning spirit. They are equally gifted at making error sound good. The Apostle Peter also warned of the secret way these false teachers will enter, “*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction*” (2 Peter 2:1). Their method is not rough or confrontational - at least initially. They simply introduce their poison by surreptitiously mixing it in with a veneer of truth. Often, they cry “deeds not creeds,” as they seek to downgrade doctrine.

These individuals are frequently knowledgeable, attractive, seductive, eloquent, and scholarly. They may appear humble and interested in the knowledge and the welfare of believers. They know just the right words to flatter you. Their morals and courtesy may be above reproach. This was certainly true of heretics like Arius and Socinus. Such “silver-tongued devils” can talk the language of believers. They can wax earnestly about Jesus Christ, the Bible, salvation etc. However, watch what they add or substitute. Remember, it is not just what they say to need to watch, but what they leave out. When you least expect it, they will slip in the poison. They claim to be strengthening the work of God, while they work to undermine its very foundation to, “*deceive the*

hearts of the simple.” The results of their teaching are always destructive. In Romans 16:19 the apostle commends this church for their orthodoxy, “*For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf.*” However, being good and orthodox will not keep evil men from entering your church. Indeed, it only encourages the devil to send them. The test of our faithfulness is not whether they enter, but how we respond when we recognise them. All too many are intimidated into silence in case they offend relatives or those that are wealthy or influential. That was exactly the mistake Eli made with his two godless sons!

Paul’s motive in heralding this note of warning is for the benefit of the saints in Rome, “*but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.*” He reminds them that one day soon God will destroy all of the works and workers of Satan, “*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*” Paul’s heart then rises up in a prayer of benediction that God would give them the grace to withstand the assault of the devil, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*”

“GLORY TO GOD” (Romans 16:21-27)

After he has finished unfolding the great doctrines of the gospel, the Apostle Paul concludes this Epistle by a great doxology of praise. Every preacher's heart should be moved by his message. If it doesn't move him, then how does he expect it to move anyone else. In Romans 1:16 he set forth his theme as: “*the Gospel of Christ.*” After he has unfolded his great theme of the doctrines of the gospel in the preceding sixteen chapters, Paul's heart naturally is moved to praise God. He extols the:

- (1) GREAT WORK
- (2) GREAT INSTRUMENT
- (3) GREAT OBJECT

(1) GREAT WORK - The first thing the apostle glories in is the great work of the gospel. In v25 he points out that the gospel has the “*power to stablish you.*” This Greek word translated “*stablish*” has the idea of to put or place something firmly in a location, cause it to be fixed or establish it in a place. Only God is able to effect this result (cf. Romans 14:4). The first thing the gospel does is to establish our lives on an unshakeable rock. In Matthew 7 the Lord Jesus Christ compared a true believer to a man who built his house on a rock. We are told, “*And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*” Despite the raging storm “*it fell not.*” This is because “*for it was founded upon a rock.*” That was the key to its durability. It is not the wisdom of man's design or the aesthetic beauty of the home that is critical but the foundation.

This is not the only way we become established in Christ. As we mature as believers we become strengthened or stablished in Him. Paul told the Roman believers in chapter one, “*For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established*” (Romans 1:11). This word “*established*” is the same Greek word used in Romans 16:25. The Christian life is never meant to be static. God's purpose is that we are to move from being babes in Christ to mature saints. As we do so, we become stronger and established in our faith. A child is born to become an adult and a parent is concerned if there is no development. Acting like an infant as a teenager is not cute! Likewise, the Lord is worried when believers remain immature many years after they have been converted. The book of Romans unfolds the great fullness of the gospel message. The purpose of this doctrinal and practical treatise is not to produce mere intellectual attainment. The great purpose is to cause a growth in your life spiritually. This will prevent a church being blown around by every wind of false doctrine (cf. Eph. 4:14). This stability is what the apostle desires in the saints in Rome.

Paul knows that once a church is strengthened spiritually on the nourishment of the Word of God it will grow outwardly. The early church grew this way (Acts 2:42-47) Notice the significance of the order – as they members continue in doctrine and become spiritually stronger, then “*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*” The job of the pastors and elders of any church is to take care of the spiritual depth of that church, and then trust God to take care of the breadth of it.

(2) GREAT INSTRUMENT - Paul then ascribes glory to the great instrument that is used to do the good work of establishing men and women in their faith. This is none other than “*the preaching of Jesus Christ.*” The heart of the gospel is the revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ. We live by the power of “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27). Now, this Jesus Christ is not the subject of Paul's thinking but, “*according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets....*” The Jesus Christ that Paul preached was objectively revealed in Scriptures. For even in Paul's day there was those in the church preaching a false Christ by a counterfeit Holy Spirit and another Gospel. (2 Cor. 11:4)

Today in modern Christianity we have all kinds of false “Jesus Christs” proclaimed. We have the longhaired rock n’ roll hippy Jesus; we have the non-judgmental Jesus who loves you despite your sinful lifestyle; we have the Jesus who lives to make you happy and to improve your self-esteem. The Jesus Christ is often misrepresented as a kind of personal genie that pops out of the bottle when you rub it to give you whatever you desire. Yet, the Jesus Christ of the Bible is one who calls His disciples to self-denial, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”* (Matt. 16:24). It is Peter who declared the call to suffer like Christ, *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (1 Peter 2:21).

Paul’s great subject was the preaching of Jesus Christ. That was the instrument he gloried in to reach the Gentile world with the gospel. This was the instrument that built the apostolic church. We read this throughout Acts. (cf. Acts 8:5; 8:35; 9:19-20) Every true preacher is to be like a waiter. God is the chef that prepares the meal to feed His people. The waiter’s job is to deliver the meal that the chef has prepared without adding to it or subtracting from it. That is the same for a preacher. He doesn’t come up with the meal. It is God’s message of the preaching of Christ. The preacher’s job is to get this to his hearers without alteration. Let me say this bluntly. The message we preach is Jesus Christ. There is no other star here but the *“Bright and Morning Star”* (Rev. 22:16). We echo the heart of the apostle Paul when he cried, *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul was not interested in exalting self in his messages, *“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord”* (2 Cor. 4:5). People are not going to get saved by anyone else than by Jesus Christ, *“the author and finisher of our faith”* (Heb. 12:2). Christians are not going to be properly motivated to serve God by anyone else. The apostles always point to Christ as the power, example, and motivation for believers to live Christian lives. Indeed, it was Jesus Christ Himself who set this precedent, *“And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:44-45).

(3) GREAT OBJECT - Paul is going to bring all of his thoughts together in v27, *“To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”* The great object of our worship is *“To God only wise, be glory.”* Every other religion in this world starts with man and tells man to improve himself by seeking to work his way back to God. But true Christianity acknowledges that salvation starts with God.

God has to plan it all before the foundation of the world, God had to give His only begotten Son, God had to effect it all in our lives, and God has to perfect it all in keeping us all the way to glory. We were dead in our trespasses and in sin. God had to come seeking us. Adam and Eve were not seeking God in Genesis 3 after the Fall. Rather they were trying to run away from God. It was God who came down and sought them out. It was God who revealed His plan of salvation to them, *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Gen. 3:15). This is why the angels sang in the first Christmas carol in Luke 2:14, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*

The Lord did all of this without the advice or assistance of any man. Paul makes it clear that the golden chain of redemption from predestination to glorification is all tied up in God’s power and will in Romans 8:29-30. There is no room for man to get in. So, God alone gets all the glory. But man is always trying to rob God of His glory. That is why we have the Roman Catholic Church and all of the cults who teach salvation by works. They want man to get some of God’s glory for their salvation. However, man can never claim glory for salvation. It is all of God. Man cannot even get credit for seeking the Lord as He first sought us out.

CONCLUSION

None of us deserve to go to heaven. If God cast us all into hell, He would be fully justified. Every man or woman who finds themselves in heaven can praise no one but God and if they find themselves in hell they can blame no one but themselves. Paul has endeavoured to set forth every possible reason for glorifying God and humbling man in this epistle. He has deliberately set out to lift up the greatness and glory of the gospel plan. So if you are a believer here today, when Paul says, *“To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen”* you simply add your “AMEN.” Is that the cry of your heart? Do you live for the glory of God?

When Paul says, *“There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God”* (Romans 3:10-11), then you simply say “AMEN.” When Paul writes, *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23) say “AMEN.” When Paul declares, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1) say “AMEN.” When Paul makes clear, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Romans 8:1) say “AMEN.” And when Paul cries in triumph,

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

you should echo “AMEN.” We will sing the glory of God in heaven (Rev. 5:12-13). This is what we must sing on earth also.

To God be the glory, great things He has done;

So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,

Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,

And opened the life gate that all may go in.