

Chapter 16 is Paul's conclusion to this great letter and his personal greetings and commendations to individuals he knows in Rome. Many in this list of names are only mentioned here, but even this teaches us many things about the infant church and culture into which it was born.

In chapter 15 Paul had spoken of a mutual indebtedness among believers. The Gentiles were indebted to the Jewish believers for the salvation they enjoyed, so they gave a financial gift to help the Jewish Christians in Rome who were destitute (15:27). By receiving the gift, the Jews would then be indebted to the Gentile believers for their help. This is part of the beauty of the church. The church is a gathering of people who depend on one another. In Romans 15:5–7 Paul said, "May the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." In Romans 16, this theme is applied to specific individuals. In this passage, Paul mentions 26 individuals, two families, and possibly three house churches (it is unclear what "those of Aristobulus" [16:10] and "those of Narcissus" [16:11] refer to. Although most translations insert the words, "of the household of" or "of the family of," those additions are not present in the original Greek. Some have suggested it is the churches these men lead).

**16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;
16:2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her
in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many,
and of myself as well.**

In Paul's day, people were highly mobile so they often had a network of acquaintances throughout the Roman Empire. It was an era of history when Rome had brought peace and stability to the world, Greek had become the lingua franca so everyone could communicate, and for the first time, there were roads that spread out to every major city. Rome also built harbors that made movement across the Mediterranean Sea easy. Therefore, the gospel could spread quickly. These conditions may have even been part of the reason that Paul says in Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son."

In Paul's travels he had met many people from different places. This is evident from the first verse; Phoebe was an acquaintance of Paul and a servant (*διδάκονος*; *diakonos*; "deacon") of the church in Cenchrea. It is reasonable to assume that Paul knew her fairly well since Cenchrea is only about 8 miles from Corinth where Paul stayed for 18 months (Acts 18:1–18, cf. v.11) and wrote the letter of Romans.

It appears from verses 1 and 2 that Paul expected Phoebe to arrive at the church at the same time his letter did. Although we cannot know for sure, it has been traditionally believed that she may have been the person who carried the letter to the church in Rome for Paul. In those days, although there was an official mail service for the emperor, there was no postal service for anyone else, so people often carried letters for each other as they traveled from place to place. In port cities, people could try to find someone who was traveling and hire them to carry letters for them. This, of course, required quite a bit

of trust so people preferred to have people they knew carry letters for them. If Paul was in Corinth and Phoebe was going to Rome, he may have asked her to carry the letter. And considering that the church would not have known her, Paul's commendation would help her be more easily received.

Through Paul's letter we also see how those in the early church related to each other. Paul calls Phoebe his sister. In Romans 16:13 he refers to the mother of Rufus as *his* mother. The church is not just a community of believers; it is also a *family*. There is a mutual love and a mutual dependence among its members.

Furthermore, Paul tells the church to receive Phoebe *in the Lord*. That is, they were not just to receive her as Phoebe; they were to receive her because of their mutual relationship to Christ (see also 16:3, 5, 7, 9, 10). It is Jesus and our relationship to Him that bonds us together and makes us brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers.

Paul also reminded the church to receive Phoebe in a manner worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she needed. In a word, he was asking them to show her hospitality. They were to provide her with food and lodging and meet any other needs she may have had while she was there. Hospitality was a huge part of the life of the early church. It was a cultural virtue but also a necessity for travelers. As people traveled from place to place they needed somewhere to sleep and eat since hotels and motels didn't exist. There were some inns, but they were often just appendages to homes, used by the household to supplement the family income. In other words, Paul wasn't asking that the church find Phoebe a motel, he was asking that they take her into their own homes and care for her as a family member. Receiving one another and being gracious to one another should still be a characteristic of the church.

16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

16:4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;

16:5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

In Romans 16:3–5 Paul says, "Greet Prisca and Aquila." Prisca and Aquila are better known as Aquila and *Priscilla* who, in Acts 18, took Apollos (an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures who boldly proclaimed Jesus but misunderstood baptism) and taught him more accurately. Paul calls them "fellow-workers," another expression that describes how Paul viewed others (cf. 16:9, 21). In Romans 16:12 Paul calls Tryphaena and Tryphosa workers in the Lord. He also says Persis worked hard *in the Lord*. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul tells every believer to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Christians are not simply to have a faith in Christ; they are to do the work of their Master with zeal.

Paul also greets those in the church that met at Aquila and Priscilla's house (16:5a). This reflects the shape of the church in the first century. Christians did not have church buildings to gather in; they met in homes.

Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

In NT times Asia referred to Asia Minor, the area we now call Turkey.

16:6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Verse 7 has generated quite a bit of discussion in our day. Paul calls Andronicus (a man) and Junias (a woman) “apostles.” Those who believe that the Bible does not make any distinctions in gender roles take this to mean that Junias had the same authority as Paul; both were apostles. However, when we look at the Greek usage of the word “apostle,” it most commonly just meant “messenger” or “emissary” (also see 2 Cor. 8:22–23; Phil. 2:25). It wasn’t until it was used of Paul and the Twelve as unique individuals sent by Christ that it took on a technical meaning of “the Apostles.” Thus, for a number of reasons, it seems least problematic to interpret this as a husband and wife who were sent as missionaries by a local congregation, not apostles in the technical sense used of Paul and the Twelve.

16:8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

16:9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

16:10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.

16:11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

16:12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

16:13 Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

16:14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.

16:15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Through this long list of names, we can see that the ministry of Paul was not the work of one man. Paul depended upon a large number of people to help him accomplish God’s purposes.

After naming people to greet, Paul tells the church to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (16:16). A kiss on the cheek was widely practiced, especially among Jews. It was a sign of intimacy indicating reception and acceptance. However, this verse does not make kissing normative, it makes greeting normative. Kissing is culturally interpreted. Each culture views it differently. Americans do not readily kiss strangers but we do have cultural expressions that make people feel warmly welcomed and accepted. The verse tells us to use these expressions often.

Paul then says, "All the churches of Christ greet you" (16:16b). In church history, Paul had become the central apostle in the church as a whole. He was the primary individual whom God used to spread the gospel in the Gentile world so he knew many churches. Although the churches are not named, the comment reminds us that no one church is an independent entity; rather, it is part of a greater fellowship of believers. There should be interdependence among churches. As believers, we have one faith, one Lord, one gospel. Our local church is not alone. We need to pray for and support other churches committed to the gospel.

16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

16:18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

16:19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.

In verse 17 Paul changes gears. His letter is coming to a close and he has some last minute words of advice that he wants to tell the church. Verses 17 and 19 are a warning that tell the church of its responsibility to maintain the truth. Many heretical teachings come into existence by those who profess to know Christ. In the Book of Acts Paul told the church in Ephesus that there would be people who would attempt to destroy them. He said, "*some of our number to whom we gave no instruction*" are upsetting others (Acts 15:24). John also spoke of some who "*went out from us*" who taught false doctrine (1 Jn. 2:19). Galatians 2:4 mentions "*false brethren*" who wanted to put believers back under the bondage of the law. 2 Peter 2:1–3 states, "there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned. . . ." Jude also says, that some "*have crept in unnoticed . . . ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*" (Jude 1:4). Then in Acts 20:28–31 he warned, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock. . . I know that after my departure savage wolves *will come in among you*, not sparing the flock; and *from among your own selves men will arise*, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert. . ."

Romans 16:17 says, "keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances." A hindrance is an obstacle that impedes the progress of the church. In Romans 14:13 Paul told believers "not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way;" now he addresses people who cause dissensions and hindrances in the church in general. God's desire is that Christians be *of the same mind* so that with *one accord* they may *with one voice* glorify God (Ro. 15:5–6). Disunity is a sign of spiritual sickness and needs to be watched for and stopped before it causes issues within the church.

The warning is conditioned by the expression, "contrary to the teaching which you learned." Someone who causes a disturbance by opposing false doctrine is not the person Paul has in mind; rather, Paul is speaking of people who are troublemakers or teaching things *contrary* to the word of God. These people should be completely cut off from fellowship. Verse 18 tells us why: "For such men are slaves, not of our

Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” Paul’s assumption is that all people are slaves. No one is so powerful that they are self-defining. Everyone serves a master. We are either slaves to sin and serve ourselves or slaves to Christ. People who cause dissention and hindrances are not slaves of Christ; they are slaves of their own appetites and are often persuasive in speech. “By their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (16:18). The church is always to be on the alert for such people.

Paul was aware that the church in Rome was obedient to the gospel. He rejoiced in knowing that word of their obedience had spread everywhere (16:19a). He wants them to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil (16:19b). They needed a sense of discernment to know what is good and what is evil. False teaching is often so well disguised that it is difficult to see it creeping in.

16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Verse 20 introduces another shift in Paul’s letter. The Scripture is clear that the world is under the control of Satan. Yet people either tend to “demythologize” Satan and ignore him or they overestimate his power. In Christ, Satan is already defeated; his destiny is determined. But the war itself has not yet ended. When Christ comes again Satan will be crushed completely and his influence removed from the face of the earth. The church has always looked forward to that day with eager anticipation.

A number of places predict Satan’s defeat:

- John 12:31: “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”
- 2 Thessalonians 2:8: “Then that lawless one (Satan) will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;
- Hebrews 2:14: “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,
- 1 John 3:8: “. . . The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

16:21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

16:22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

16:23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.

16:24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Tertius was acting as an amanuensis for Paul (someone who wrote the letter as another dictated what to write; 16:22; contrast Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; 1 Cor. 16:21). This was a common practice and still is today.

16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,

16:26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;

16:27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

Verses 25–27 are Paul’s final benediction. The prominent idea is that the gospel is the pinnacle of the history of God’s salvation, and a message that is applicable to everyone. Paul’s intent is to stimulate the Roman Christians to praise God by reminding them of the wonderful salvation they enjoy in Christ (Moo, 938).

First, he speaks of God: “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel” (16:25a). God is powerful enough (He is able) to keep us secure by strengthening (establishing) us through the gospel. Paul calls the gospel “my gospel” since it is the gospel he proclaimed, the gospel that God had entrusted to him (Ro. 1:1). “The preaching of Christ” is synonymous to the gospel. The gospel is found in the preaching of Jesus Christ; that is, He is the center of the gospel message.

The gospel is further described as truth that God revealed; Paul says the gospel is based on (according to) “the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past” (16:25b). In other words, the gospel of Christ is the revelation of the mystery. In this case, the mystery (in Paul’s writings) is the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation (Eph. 3:3–6; Col. 1:26–27). Although the OT (“the Scriptures of the prophets”) testified of the inclusion of the Gentiles, this truth was passed over unnoticed because it was not fully understood or experienced. However, with the coming of Christ, the mystery (that the Gentiles can share the salvation promised to Israel) “has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith of all the nations” (Ro. 1:5).

The gospel is also said to be “according to the commandment of the eternal God.” In other words, it has been God’s plan since the beginning; the gospel is not plan “B”; it is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Then in verse 27 Paul dedicates everything to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory forever.

Now to Him who is able to establish you

according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ

that is, the gospel that is

according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets,

and the gospel that is

according to the commandment of the eternal God,

and

has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;

To this God who establishes us with this gospel, **to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.**

ROMANS IN REVIEW:

In Romans 1:1 Paul identified himself as a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, *set apart for the gospel of God*. The main body of the Book of Romans began with man's need of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation; in it, the righteousness of God (the righteousness that man needs) is revealed (Ro. 1:16–17).

In Romans 1:18–3:20 Paul gave the reasons why men lack righteousness.

First, he says that men “*exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*” (Ro. 1:22–23). In addition, both the moral man and the religious man, Jew and Gentile, fall short of the standard of righteousness that God demands. He concludes that “every mouth may be closed, and the entire world may become accountable to God;” (3:19), for all have sinned and *fall short of the glory of God* (Ro. 3:23).

Romans 5 explains how faith works and how man can be placed in a position where he can glorify God once again.

Romans 5:1–2 says, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and *we exult in hope of the glory of God.*”

Chapter 11 declares the wisdom of God in His ways of salvation and concludes that from Him and through Him and to Him are all things and “to Him be the glory forever” (11:32–36).

Chapters 12–15 apply salvation to our daily walks with God, and tell how our actions glorify Him.

15:5–7 says, “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that *with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us *to the glory of God.*”

Lastly, Romans 16 concludes with the gospel and our obedience to the gospel for the glory of God.

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my *gospel* . . . to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, *be the glory forever. Amen*” (16:25–27).

So in the beginning and the ending of this letter Paul says that the gospel and his apostleship (and, by implication, our ministry and your life!) have this great aim: that Jesus Christ would be seen as glorious—magnificent—among all the peoples of the world through the obedience of Christians that flows from their faith in Him.