

## Christians Greeting Christians Romans 16:1-27

We have come to the end of the book of Romans. If my counting is correct, this is the 41<sup>st</sup> Sermon in this series. Whenever I finish a book I have a mixture of emotions. There is a sense of satisfaction over having completed such a grand undertaking. Part of me is looking forward to the next series. In this case it is the book of Genesis, which I am very much looking forward to preaching. But I am also sad. Paul, and the book of Romans have become a close friend to me. They have helped me to know God more accurately. I have seen the character of my God more beautifully. I have been helped to not despair over my sins and failures, but to continue casting myself upon the mercy of God promised to us in Christ. And I have been strengthened in my faith to offer myself to Him as a living sacrifice with more joy, and with more peace.

It is in the Gospel alone that the power of God is manifest for salvation.

Romans has taught us that this salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. The Gospel is the message that brings you into Union with the God of the Universe.

If you have a head knowledge of the doctrines but miss the wonder of how they enable you to partake of God, you are missing the point. God wants you to know him. God wants you to offer your whole self to him.

But as we come to the final chapter of this glorious book, we run into a lot of names. It is a chapter full of greetings. Through Paul's ministry and his many travels, he has made friendships with many people. A good many of those people are now living in Rome. And Paul wants to remember those people: say hello to ... for me. Not only is this common courtesy, but the people that Paul names are known to the rest of the church in Rome. By mentioning these names, the rest of the Church would feel a greater bond with Paul as well. They may not know Paul, but they know people who know Paul.

Paul wants to evoke these feelings. He wants the Romans to feel a bond with him. And he also wants the Roman Christians to feel a bond with the larger body of Christ. Not only does he send his own greetings, but he also sends greetings from his ministry team, and from the rest of the churches that he has established.

What can we learn from all this? One vital lesson is that ministry is relational. People matter.

Paul doesn't merely know the doctrines of the Gospel. He knows the people who have been saved by God's grace.

Read Romans 16:1-27.

Even though most of the chapter is full of greetings, Paul does not begin with a greeting. He begins with an encouragement to welcome.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe,  
a servant of the church at Cenchreae,  
2 that you may welcome her in the Lord  
in a way worthy of the saints,  
and  
help her in whatever she may need from you,  
for she has been a patron  
of many  
and  
of myself as well.

Who is Phoebe? It is very likely that she was the one given the task of carrying the letter of Romans to Rome.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 16:27** To God only wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. <Written to the Romans from Corinthus, *and sent* by Phebe servant of the church at Cenchrea.>

There was no mail service in Ancient Rome. Letters were sent by trustworthy people who carried them. Phoebe was a trustworthy servant. She may have other reasons for going to Rome and Paul found it convenient to send his letter by her. But it is also possible that she went out of her way to carry Paul's letter. This was not her only act of service. She was a patron of many, including Paul. She had resources and made use of them in the work of the gospel. In fact, she was known as a servant of the church at Cenchreae. Cenchreae was the port city of Corinth, the city from which Paul was writing this letter.

The word servant in the Greek is *deaconon*, from which we derive our word "deacon." The question then is whether Phoebe held an official office of deacon, or whether she was simply a woman who was distinguished for her life of service in the

Church. It is not the practice of our church to ordain women to the office of deacon. But Phoebe is a good example of the importance of women in the overall life and ministry of the Church. The Church needs both men and women to be active in the ministry. Phoebe was known for her service to Paul and to the Church in Cenchreae.

Because she was known for her service, and because she is likely carrying the letter that Paul was writing, Paul exhorts the Church in Rome to receive her warmly. He commends her to them, and he expects that they will be as hospitable to her as Christians ought to be. Who knows how long Phoebe would have remained in Rome before traveling back to Cenchreae, but it was likely that it may have been some time.

The point that we cannot miss is that the Church is a team. Paul was not a lone ranger. He worked together with others so that the ministry in people's lives could continue to grow. If Phoebe does not faithfully carry this letter to Rome, it is humanly possible to think that we would not have the book of Romans today.

Of course, this is all under God's sovereign hand. But it is cool to see the different parts that people play.

In verses 3-16, we have a list of 26 named people to whom Paul wants to send his greetings. That's a long list. I am not going to go through the entire list one by one. I will be much more selective. But before I make some individual observations, it is also valuable to make some general observations.

I am indebted to other commentators who have made some of these observations. As many as 2/3 of the names are the names of slaves or freedmen, ex-slaves. That means the other 1/3 were names from the higher social classes. Whether you are rich or poor, you have a place in the family of God. Whether you come from a good family or a family that has been shattered by sin, you have a place in the family of God. God was saving people from every social class, and they were gathered together in the Church.

It is also worthy to notice that there are 7 names of women. Of course, there were women in the church. But Paul makes a point to honor these women for their "service" in the ministry. In verse 6, the only thing that Paul mentions about Mary is that she "worked hard" for the Romans believers. We have no idea of what that work was. We do not need to know. But she was known for her hard work in God's kingdom. For a church to be healthy, both men and women must be working in the church.

One other general observation is that the list includes both married couples and individuals, many of whom would have been single or possibly married to unbelievers.

Just as God calls his people from every social class, he also calls his people from every walk of life.

Let's look at a few of the individuals Paul mentions. We are familiar with Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila from Acts 18. They are the couple who further instructed Apollos in the way of the Lord. (Acts 18:26) They had lived in Rome before. They had to leave when Emperor Claudius commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And now they were back in Rome. They were tent makers by trade, like Paul. And it seems that a portion of the Christians there met in their house for worship.

3       **Greet Prisca and Aquila,**  
                  my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,  
4                who risked their necks for my life,  
                  to whom not only I give thanks  
                  but  
                  all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.  
5       **Greet also the church in their house.**

Priscilla and Aquila were a married couple ministering together. Paul considered them "fellow-workers". They hosted church services in their house. And they "risked their necks" for Paul.

The point is not that we should meet in homes rather than a church building. The point is that for the church to gather for worship, people had to work. Someone had to make sacrifices so that Christians could gather. I do not know the details of what Priscilla and Aquila had to do. I have a better idea of all that goes into making it possible to gather for worship here at Faith. The question to ask ourselves is whether we would be recognized as "workers" in the ministry of the Church. Paul recognizes Priscilla and Aquila as fellow workers.

In verse 7 we see another married couple.

7       **Greet Andronicus and Junia,**  
                  my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners.  
                  They are well known to the apostles,  
                  and  
                  they were in Christ before me.

It becomes obvious why Paul does not think it necessary for him to do much ministry in Rome. Priscilla and Aquila were very capable teachers. Andronicus and Junia would also be very qualified as well. They were Jews who had been converted very early, even before Paul. So early that the Apostles knew and respected them.

In verse 13, Paul mentions a man named Rufus.

13 Greet **Rufus**,  
chosen in the Lord;  
also  
his mother,  
who has been a mother to me as well.

Rufus is worth mentioning because he displays God's sovereign election. Every person who is saved is saved by God's sovereign election, but sometimes it is so obvious that we simply stand in awe.

Rufus is mentioned in the book of Mark. And although we cannot say with absolute certainty that they are one and the same, I am convinced. Most scholars believe that the book of Mark was originally written for the church at Rome.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 15:21** And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

Simon of Cyrene was the man the Romans compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. Mark tells us that Rufus and Alexander were his sons. It makes little sense that Mark would mention these sons unless they were known to the people to whom he is writing. And the fact that Paul also refers to Rufus as "chosen in the Lord" adds to the connection. If he were simply talking about salvation, all of the people mentioned were God's elect. But if he were referring to the incident of God choosing Simon to bear the cross of the Lord, and the subsequent redemption of Simon and his family, then it makes more sense.

Simon was in Jerusalem on the day that Jesus is being crucified. He just happens to be at the very place where Jesus stumbles and drops the crossbar. And he just happens to be the man whom the Romans choose to carry the cross. Coincidence? I don't think so. Simon very likely becomes a Christian. And his wife and children along with him. God is sovereign in all of these details.

God is sovereign in the details of your life as well. What connections has God orchestrated to bring you to Christ? They may not be as obvious as Rufus. But they are there. Give thanks to God for his sovereign mercy.

The connections go one step further. Rufus' mother was a powerful influence on Paul. Paul says that she was a mother to him. In some way that we do not know Rufus' mom spiritually influenced Paul. How cool is that? Every Christian has a part to play. God does not simply save you. He wants to save others through you. While we cannot save anyone, God does use us in the process.

In this long list we see that these people are Paul's friends. Four times he calls individuals "beloved". Making friends with others in the church is not always easy. For some it is more difficult than others. But it is a duty given to all of us. We do not all have to be social butterflies. But we do need to purposely build meaningful relationships with others in the body of Christ.

But building relationships must be coupled with purpose. Six times in this list Paul mentions those who are either fellow-workers or who have worked hard. The Church is not a social club. The relationships that are being built have a purpose: to build one another up in Christ.

This is where it gets difficult. I think this is why Paul calls it work. Discipleship does not come natural. Trying to encourage others in the faith can be awkward. It can be frustrating. It is certainly tiring.

But it is worth it. Paul honors those who have worked hard in the gospel. And I have found over the years that many of the best relationships have been formed as I have worked with others in the ministry.

Are you purposely seeking to build relationships with the other members of Faith Church? Are you asking God to use you to build others up in the faith? Do not think that because you do not have it all together that you cannot help others. God often uses our honesty in our failures and shortcomings as much as he uses our victories.

Do not use your imperfections as an excuse to not find a way to serve. Paul does not commend any of these people because they are perfect. He commends them because they are dear to him, and they give of themselves for the ministry.

In verse 16, Paul finishes his greetings to saints that were living in Rome.

<sup>16</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss.  
All the churches of Christ greet you.

The holy kiss was a peck on the cheek that is still common in the Middle East today. The West no longer makes a practice of this. But at a minimum, we ought to have some expression of our unity in Jesus Christ. Hugs, handshakes, even fist bumps can express warm greetings that are appropriate among God's people.

Paul also wants to give a formal greeting to the Christians at Rome from "all the churches of Christ". Of course, Paul does not even know "all the Churches of Christ". He is simply extending a formal courtesy because he believes that theologically, all the churches make up one body of Christ.

In verse 17, Paul makes an abrupt change of tone. Christians may all be one in Christ, but there are some people who call themselves Christians that should not be welcomed. They are the divisive ones and those who hinder Christians from knowing the truth of Jesus Christ.

17           I appeal to you, brothers,  
                  to watch out for those who  
                          cause divisions  
                          and  
                          create obstacles  
                                  contrary to the doctrine that you have been  
                  taught;  
          avoid them.

18           For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ,  
                  but  
                  their own appetites,  
                  and  
                          by smooth talk and flattery  
          they deceive the hearts of the naive.

19           For your obedience is known to all,  
                  so that I rejoice over you,  
                  but  
          I want you to be  
                  wise as to what is good  
                  and  
                  innocent as to what is evil.

The motivation of these people is their own appetites. I think it is best to take appetite as meaning selfishness. They care about themselves. They are not truly motivated by service to Jesus and building people up in the faith. But even though their motivation is truly corrupt, it is not always obvious. They are able to use “smooth talk and flattery”. They can talk a good game. They may even seem pious for a time. Discerning their true intentions requires wisdom.

What is Paul’s counsel when it becomes clear that such a person is in their midst? Avoid them. This is a strong statement. It would not have felt very loving. In many ways, we are to be more accommodating to a Christian who has been entangled in sin, than we are these divisive people.

What makes all this difficult is that the divisive person does not recognize themselves as being divisive. They often argue that they are the ones redeeming the Church. I cannot flesh all this out in this sermon. What is important now is to see that we are to be on the look out for such people. Paul does not have anyone in mind or he would have mentioned them by name. But he has enough experience in the ministry to know that they will creep in.

The Church can tolerate differences of opinion and practice within its fellowship. Of course, we must make distinctions between the majors and the minors. This is one of the blessings of having a Confession of Faith. It helps us to see which issues more important and which issues are not worth fighting about.

Justification by faith alone – major issue.

Are you A-millennial or Pre-millennial – not as important.

Verse 20 is worth mentioning.

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

I believe that while Paul is making a point to be encouraging, he knows that ministry in the Church is tough. We struggle to make progress in our own personal sanctification. And when we add to this a desire to see others in the Church grow up into Christ, there is plenty of room for discouragement.

Sanctification, becoming who God wants us to be, is a long frustrating road. And while we struggle against our own flesh, and against the world, Satan is the true enemy



of the Church. How encouraging to know that Satan will be crushed. And that he will be crushed under our feet. This is a reference to Genesis 3:15.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 3:15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

God is the God of peace. True peace will only come when the enemy of God is crushed. God will do this crushing. The crushing will take place "under our feet." This is a connecting of the work of the cross with the victory of the Church.

It is not enough that Jesus was personally victorious. His victory must find its completion in our victory over Satan. We may be in a terrible struggle with Sin, Satan, and the World. But final victory is ours as we cling to Jesus Christ. That is encouraging.

Romans 16:21-24.

These are greetings from individuals who are with Paul. They want to personally send their greetings.

I will just make mention of one of them: Tertius.

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

22 I **Tertius**, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you.  
Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

24

If you have not heard this before, it may come as a surprise to you that Paul did not actually write the book of Romans. In fact, many of the letters of Paul were not written by his hand. Paul was the author, but he made use of what we call an "amanuensis". That is a strange word, but necessary. An amanuensis was a secretary. But there was a range as to how much leeway that was given to the amanuensis. Sometimes it could be simple dictation. At other times the author might say something like, remember what

we wrote in that other letter? Write something very similar this time, but with some adjustment to the new situation. And after it was written, the author would look it over for his approval. This method may not seem pure to us, but Paul did not think it in any way contrary to the inspiration or authority of the finished product – that it was indeed Holy Scripture.

How refreshing that even in the inspiration of Scripture, God made use of a team! And, as much as we are all called to build relationships in the church, it is nice to see that not everyone has to be the host of a church meeting. Some people are not as relational as others.

Again, the Church does not merely need Pauls. The Church needs Tertiuses.

In vv. 25-27, we come to the final doxology.

Read:

25     Now  
          to him **who is able to strengthen you**  
                  according to  
                      my gospel  
                      and  
                      the preaching of Jesus Christ,  
          according to the revelation of the mystery  
                  that was kept secret for long ages  
26                    but  
                  has now been disclosed  
                  and  
          through the prophetic writings  
                  has been made known to all nations,  
                          according to the command of the eternal  
                  God,  
                                  to bring about the obedience of faith-  
27            to the only wise God be glory forevermore  
                  through Jesus Christ!  
                          Amen.

Each of the phrases in this doxology are found back in chapter 1.  
Paul is finishing where he began.

Concluding big picture points:

1. Christians need strengthening.
2. God is able to strengthen.
3. True strength comes from Christ alone in the Gospel alone.
4. True obedience flows out of faith and not self-reliance.
5. All of this results in glory being given to God through Jesus Christ.

Wherever you are on your journey, you need Jesus. You need the strength that only he can provide. Look to Jesus today. And as you walk this road, point one another to Jesus.

His grace is sufficient. He will help you in your time of need. He will crush Satan under your feet.

Amen.