

## **Personal Words to the Church (Romans 16:1-27)**

As in his other epistles, Paul concludes his letter to the Romans on a personal note. He extends greetings to certain individuals in the church at Rome and shares some final warnings and blessings. These personal words to the church remind us that doctrine—the meat of Romans—applies to people, real people living a real world. God cares about people. For Christians, God cares about our ministry partnerships. In this closing chapter Paul presents words of affection, words of warning, words of greeting, and words of blessing. His final words to the church in Rome inspire us to be faithful to God’s people and God’s work.

### **Words of affection—when it comes to relationships, people are important (16:1-16).**

People are the focus of God’s work in this world, and people are the focus of Paul’s conclusion to Romans.

#### ***People who serve the Lord well are worthy of commendation (16:1-2).***

A personal recommendation always helps open doors. Paul presented a personal word of commendation for a woman named Phoebe who was traveling to Rome. In fact, Phoebe may have been the courier for this epistle. Paul referred to Phoebe as a spiritual “sister.” She was also a “servant” of the church in Cenchrea, the port city near Corinth. The word “servant” is a common word that, on occasion, takes on a formal application to church leaders—“deacons” (Philippians 1:1). Although Phoebe may have held an official position in the church, Paul’s application of this term to this dear sister doesn’t require this conclusion. Paul commended Phoebe so that the church in Rome would receive her “in the Lord” and in a way that is “worthy of the saints.” Phoebe could expect a generous Christian welcome in Rome. Paul asked the church in Rome to stand by Phoebe, supporting her in whatever practical need she might have. Paul described Phoebe as a benefactor to many, including Paul himself. Phoebe must have been an outstanding Christian woman with the means to help others. She used her resources to serve other believers and was worthy of any necessary help on the part of the Christians in Rome.

#### ***People who bless others are worthy of recognition (16:3-16).***

Next Paul extends greetings to twenty-six individuals—twenty-four by name along with two unnamed women. These individuals included men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free (based largely on their names). He also refers to at least three and possibly five house churches (verses 5, 10, 11, 14, 15), gatherings of Christians that would comprise the greater

church in Rome (compare Acts 12:12; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2).

Outstanding in this list of Christians in Rome were people like Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila, who had served alongside Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:2) and Ephesus (Acts 18:18) and at some point put their lives on the line for Paul and the gospel. This couple had earned the gratitude of all the Gentile churches, and a church was currently meeting in their home in Rome (verses 3-5). Epenetus was loved by Paul and known as the first convert, the “first fruit for Christ,” in the province of Asia (verse 5). Andronicus and Junias (verse 7) were likely a married couple (although the name Junias could be masculine). These two had been imprisoned with Paul on some occasion. They had a good reputation “among the apostles”—meaning either that they were themselves apostles, or missionary representatives, of one of the churches or, more likely, that they were well known and honored by the apostles of Jesus Christ, including Paul. Also noteworthy were Rufus and his mother (verse 13). Paul describes Rufus as “chosen” in the Lord, indicating some special significance or honor. He described Rufus’ mother as his own mother, a nurturing woman in Paul’s life. Mark 15:21 mentions a man named Rufus, whose father carried the cross of Jesus, and it’s intriguing to consider this to be the same Rufus whom Paul identifies in Romans.

In verse 10 Paul refers to “the ones of Aristobulus.” These may have been slaves or household members of the brother of King Herod Agrippa I or another wealthy man by the name of Aristobulus. Verse 11 refers to “the ones of Narcissus,” a man who may have been a highly appointed servant of Emperor Claudius. Of course, all such historical connections are mere possibilities. However, we do know that members of Nero’s household were believers (Philippians 4:22). The gospel had penetrated some of the highest levels of Rome.

Other lesser known individuals in Paul’s greetings included Mary (verse 6), Ampliatus (verse 8), Urbanus (verse 9), Stachys (verse 9), Apelles (verse 10), Herodion (verse 11), two sisters named Tryphena and Tryphosa (verse 12), Persis (verse 12), Asyncritus (verse 14), Phlegon (verse 14), Hermes (verse 14), Patrobas (verse 14), Hermas (verse 14), Philologus (verse 15), Julia (verse 15), Nereus and his sister (verse 15), and Olympas (verse 15).

Paul describes some of these individuals in Rome as his “fellow workers” (verses 3, 9), “beloved” (verses 5, 8, 9, 12), “relatives”—most likely fellow Jews (verses 7, 11), and “approved” (verse 10). He instructs the church in Rome to greet one another in the culturally normal expression of respect, a holy kiss. He then extends greetings from “all the churches of Christ.” Clearly Paul held these people in high regard. He valued people in his ministry, and God values people as well.

**Words of warning—when it comes to  
divisiveness, wisdom is essential (16:17-20).**

In an unusual twist, Paul inserts into his final greetings a word of warning about those who might try to disrupt the church in Rome. Possibly his naming of so many trusted believers reminded him to point out the danger of those who cause division.

***The body of Christ must avoid people who cause division (16:17-18).***

Once again Paul exhorted Christian brothers in Rome to take action, this time to watch out for those who cause divisions within the body and put obstacles in the path of faith. These deceivers taught contrary to the true faith, the teaching which the Roman Christians had already learned. They turned away from the truth, and tried to turn others away as well. Paul had in mind a class of unbelievers, possibly the Judaizing legalists that hounded his steps at every turn. He said that such people do not serve “our Lord Christ.” Instead, they serve their own belly—their own appetites (compare Philippians 3:19). They use slick speech and false flattery in order to deceive the hearts of simple, ordinary believers. The church must avoid such people at all cost.

***The body of Christ must develop discerning minds (16:19).***

In order to resist the efforts of divisive people we must learn to discern between truth and error. Paul expressed his confidence in the Christians in Rome, noting that they had a good reputation for obedience. Paul could rejoice over them. He also warned them to be wise regarding that which is good, and innocent regarding that which is evil (compare Matthew 10:16). In other words, they should discern between good and evil, embrace the good, and shun the evil.

***The body of Christ must anticipate victory over evil (16:20).***

Having warned the Roman Christians about divisive people, Paul now assures them of victory over evil. He declared that the God of peace will ultimately crush Satan. God will use His church to accomplish this victory—“under your feet.” That victory is ever imminent—“soon” by prophetic standards. Paul then pronounces a benediction for the believers in Rome: “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all.” God’s grace is sufficient for any and every spiritual battle.

**Words of greeting—when it comes to  
ministry, teamwork is essential (16:21-24).**

Paul could now turn his attention to those who were with him in Corinth, faithful servants who shared in his work. Paul knew the power and necessity of teamwork.

***Everyone has a role to play in the body of Christ (16:21-23).***

We get the sense that a number of people were cheering Paul on as he composed this epistle to the Romans, individuals who wanted to extend their greetings to their brothers and sisters in Rome. Timothy, Paul's trusted coworker, was first in line. Along with him were Lucius, Jason (possibly the Jason of Acts 17:5-9), and Sosipater (possibly the Sopater of Acts 20:4). These last three men were "relatives," probably again meaning fellow Jews. Since Paul used a secretary to record his writings, this secretary—Tertius (meaning "the third")—now includes his own greeting to the church in Rome. Next came Paul's host, a man named Gaius whom Paul had baptized (1 Corinthians 1:14) and who also opened his house to the whole church in Corinth (compare Titius Justus in Acts 18:7). A civil official in Corinth by the name of Erastus included his greetings to the church in Rome, as did an otherwise unknown Christian ("brother") by the name of Quartus (meaning "the fourth"). These individuals constituted at least a part of Paul's ministry team in Corinth at the time.

***Everyone needs to experience the grace of Christ (16:24).***

Here a majority of Greek manuscripts include a nearly word for word repetition of the benediction Paul expressed in verse 20. "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with all of you. Amen." Whether or not this benediction was originally repeated, its truth is still powerful. We need to experience grace in serving one another in the body of Christ.

**Words of blessing—when it comes to  
the gospel, God is glorified (16:25-27).**

Paul concludes this masterful letter with a masterful blessing. He once again highlights the gospel and the God of the gospel.

***God uses the gospel to establish believers (16:25a).***

God is able to establish His people. He does so through the gospel, the good news proclaimed about His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul refers to the gospel as "my" gospel, identifying himself fully with the grace-based, law-free righteousness that's available only through faith in Jesus Christ.

***God has revealed the gospel to win the nations (16:25b-26).***

This gospel wasn't invented in the imagination of the human mind. It came from God. It's eternal. Although it had been kept silent in eternity past as a mystery to be revealed at its proper time, this gospel had been revealed in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament and made fully known in Jesus Christ. By the command of the eternal God the gospel was revealed (literally "made known") so that the Gentiles might become obedient to the faith. God's desire is for all the nations of the earth to come under the good news of His Son.

***God is worthy of eternal glory through Jesus Christ (16:27).***

The gospel of God brings glory to God. His love for lost humanity and the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, proves that God deserves all glory. "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen." With this majestic sweep of the pen Paul concludes the epistle to the Romans. God's righteousness has been revealed to sinful hearts, and sinful hearts can be restored to a right relationship with God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. As those saved by Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to grow in practical holiness, to rest in God's sovereignty, and to live transformed lives all to the glory of God. With Paul, we declare, "To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."