



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 25: Romans 16:1-27

Here we have come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Roman Christians. He has encouraged them, he has corrected them, and now he will address them as the friends and family that they are. Many people assume that, since Paul had not yet visited the church at Rome, he did not know the brethren there. This chapter demonstrates emphatically that this was simply not the case. Paul will spend the next 15 verses sending specific greetings to specific people he clearly had a relationship with, and some of whom it appears he was even physically related to.

Before you begin, read chapter 16 and mark any key words or phrases in the text.

Read Romans 16:1-2

As was stated in the introductory lesson, I personally believe that commending Phoebe to the church in Rome was one of Paul's purposes for writing this letter. In the first century church there were already many Judaizers and false teachers, Paul wanted the church in Rome to know without doubt that Phoebe was a faithful Christian and servant. He also wanted the brethren there to know that she was coming so they would be prepared to help her if she had need.

We must also address the description Paul provides of Phoebe, "a servant of the church... a patron of many and of myself as well." The word for "servant" here is in fact "*diakonos*," which is typically transliterated as "deacon." The words "deacon" and "servant" have the same meaning; however, "deacon" is used in various ways throughout the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Philippians 1:1 and Acts 6:1-4 it appears to

refer to a specific office. In both texts those chosen were expected to meet specific criteria and to fulfill a specific service. However, this word is also used in Acts 9:36 to refer to Tabitha, In Matthew 23:11, Romans 13:4, Romans 15:8, 1 Corinthians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 6:4, Galatians 2:17, Colossians 4:7 to list just a few examples.

While at times, such as in 1 Timothy, this word clearly refers to an office, at other times such as in Matthew 23:11 it clearly refers to anyone who is willing to serve another. As with our discussion of faith, we must allow context to define our terms. In Romans 16:1-2 contextually it must be used in the generic form. We know this because #1: when the term is used as an office, we either find the office of shepherd or specific qualifications included in the context, and #2 because 1 Timothy 3:12 states that a deacon is to be the husband of one wife.

Have you been a part of a congregation that in any way verified the spiritual standing of those who wished to place membership? If so, how was it done? If not, why do you believe this is a practice that is uncommon in the American church today? Should we take steps to re-incorporate this practice? Why or why not according to Scripture?



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Read Romans 16:3-15

Here we find an extensive list of personal greetings:

- Prisca and Aquila – Also seen in Acts 18:2, 18:18, 18:26, 1 Corinthians 16:19 and 2 Timothy 4:19. Paul describes them as his fellow workers, and even states that they risked their very lives for him.
- Epäenetüs – Identified as the first convert from Asia, which is just super cool.
- Mary – There are many Mary's listed in Scripture, and we have no idea who specifically this is referring to, although she is described as a hard worker.
- Andronicus and Junia – Many believe that these individuals were a married couple, although we cannot know for sure. The text describes them as Paul's "kinsmen," which could mean they were physically related or simply Jews. The text does tell us, however, that they were also imprisoned for their faith.
- Ampliatüs – Not much is known about.
- Urbanus – Not much is known about.
- Stachys – Not much is known about.
- Äpelles – The word for "approved" here means "tested or proven." It is possible that he had been through trials and remained faithful.
- Family of Aristobulus – Some argue that Aristobulus himself was not a Christian due to the phrasing here, but that man in his household were. Some even believe he

may have been the grandson of Herod the Great and the brother of Agrippa I, but we cannot know for sure (Pollard 590).

- Herodion – Once again referred to as Paul's "kinsmen." Some believe that his name refers to a freedman from Herod's family (Pollard 590).
- Family of Narcissus – Same as the household of Aristobulus, although some believe this Narcissus to be a freedman from the household of the emperor Claudius (Pollard 590).
- Tryphaena and Tryphosa – Not much is known, although many believe they were sisters (Pollard 591).
- Persis – Not much is known.
- Rufus & his mother – There is a Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21, but we have no way of knowing if that is the same individual. It is neat to think of this woman being like a mother to Paul, and drives home the influence we have as women.
- Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them – Not much is known about these individuals.
- Philogogus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas and the saints with them – Not much is known about these individuals.

It is interesting to note that even in his personal greetings, some of those Paul names are from Jewish descent, while some are from Gentile descent. Even now his focus is on getting the Roman brethren to view each other as equals, and to promote unity among the brethren.



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In these verses, Paul made sure to commend those in Rome who were truly exhibiting the character of Christ as servants of the Gospel.

If Paul were to write to your congregation today, would your name be included in the list? If not, what changes can you make to serve the Lord to the best of your ability?

Read Romans 16:16

Now that Paul has sent his personal greetings, he tells them to greet each other (remember his continual plea for their unity) and sends greetings from the other brethren he works with. While Paul encouraging them to kiss each other might be alarming to us, this was a very common practice particularly among the Jews. It was very common for fathers and mothers to kiss their children, therefore as the familial mindset permeated the church this practice became common as well (Pollard 592).

While kissing is not a culturally accepted practice in most American congregations today, how does Paul's exhortation apply to us?

Read Romans 16:17-20

Once again Paul gives us a flashing red light that says, "pay attention!" when he uses the word "appeal." He has spent this entire letter pleading for the brethren to avoid division and adhere to sound doctrine, and in closing he is going to make this petition one last time. This would be easy if false teachers had horns and pointy red tails, but Paul tells us to expect the exact opposite. Those

who wish to divide the body and malign the truth will have smooth talk and be very flattering. What they say will be appealing, it may make us feel good about ourselves and we may find ourselves wanting to believe them, however, to do so will only lead to destruction.

Yet Paul also gives us some indicators of what to watch for: these individuals will not truly serve Jesus but will instead serve themselves. By using both their "appetites" (what they do) and their "smooth speech" (what they say) as examples, Paul is encouraging us to consider both an individual's actions and their words, *especially* when it comes to doctrinal issues. If their words and actions don't line up with each other, we need to actively avoid that person. (As a side note, I believe anyone who hides their personal life, family etc. and wants to be a spiritual leader should be treated with caution, because then we cannot tell if their life truly matches what they teach.)

If an individual passes the first line caution, meaning what they do and what they say match up, our next step is to consider their words and actions in light of Scripture. Do they easily align with the word of God, or do you have to engage in textual gymnastics for them to match up? 1 Corinthians 14:33 tells us that God is not a God of confusion, if we are having to pull Scriptures out of context or justify why the text doesn't "really mean" what it plainly says, that is definitely a warning sign that this individual and their teaching should be avoided.

Who does Paul specify is most at risk from these divisive false teachers?



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How can we ensure this does not describe us?

After this warning, Paul once again praises his beloved brethren. In spite of their struggles and failures, he knows that they truly want to be obedient and rejoices over them because of it. Sisters, Paul makes it clear that knowledge is simply not sufficient, we must know God's word, but for the purpose of living in obedience to it (chapter 12).

My husband recently said something I thought was very profound. He stated, "We teach a Gospel of sin management." What he meant was that oftentimes we just teach people how to have forgiveness of sins, but we stop short of teaching them to live in obedience. After all, forgiveness of sins is popular, being a living sacrifice not so much. We must remember that God expects so much more of us than a heart that says, "What do I have to do for forgiveness, without being too inconvenienced by my faith." Sisters, our Savior did not die with a bare minimum of pain. He suffered in every way imaginable: physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. How dare we offer him the bare minimum in return?!

Adding to this Paul states that he wants them (us) to be wise as to what is good, and innocent as to what is evil. "Wise" can also mean "skillful," and "innocent" means "pure." He was encouraging them (us) to be skillful in regard to what is good, in context this would refer to being skillful in the doctrine they had been taught, and pure regarding sin. Once again, as we saw in chapter one this would include not giving approval to things God has declared sinful, even if we don't actually participate in the sin ourselves.

Finally verse 20, what a statement of triumph! Sisters, Satan *will* be crushed at the end of time! This is the one time in the history of the world where the end of the battle has already been determined before the battle takes place! Spoiler alert, Jesus wins!

Read Romans 16:21-23

In verses 1-15 Paul gave his greetings for the brethren in Rome, and here he provides the greeting of his companions:

- Timothy – We see Timothy throughout the New Testament, and it is to him that the epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy are addressed. We know that Timothy's mother and grandmother were both faithful Christians, although his father was a Gentile (2 Timothy 1:5, Acts 16:1).
- Lucius – There is a "Lucius" mentioned in Acts 13:1, however we don't know for sure if this was the same man or not. Some even claim that this could be Luke, who wrote Luke's gospel account and Acts (Pollard 601).
- Jason – A man named Jason was significant in Acts 17:5-9, but once again we do not know for sure if this was the same Jason.
- Sosipater – Some people believe this was the same person listed in Acts 20:4, however once again this is uncertain (Pollard 601).
- Tertius – Served as Paul's amanuensis (scribe), which is why 2 Thessalonians 3:17 specifies that Paul was writing with his own hand, typically a scribe wrote for him. Therefore this is not a contradiction



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to 1:1, these were Paul's words, they were just physically copied down by Tertius.

- Gaius – There are several by the name Gaius in Scripture (Acts 19:29, Acts 20:4, and 1 Cor. 1:14), however we do not know exactly which Gaius this is referring to. Whichever Gaius was generous enough to host not only Paul but the whole church in that location.
- Erastus – As mentioned in the first letter this Erastus was likely the city treasurer of Corinth, and had a reputation for being a good and generous man.
- Quartus – Not much is known about him.

Read Romans 16:25-27

With these few verses Paul sums up the entire book:

- Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to the gospel and the preaching of Jesus – chapters 3-8.
- According to the mystery of the revelation that had been kept secret – The role of the Jews and Gentiles in the scheme of redemption (11:25-36).
- Has now been disclosed through the prophets – approximately 60 Old Testament quotes/references in Romans.
- To bring about the obedience to the faith – chapters 12-15.
- And what is the purpose of all of this? To praise and glorify God the Father through Jesus Christ!

In what ways do each of these areas glorify God through Jesus?

Set aside some time this week to specifically pray and praise God for the victory we have been given through Jesus. Is there someone in your life who does not yet have that victory? If so, be intentional about talking to them about Jesus, so that they too can share in the victory!

Truth for Today Commentary an Exegesis & Application of the Holy Scriptures. Romans an Exegetical Study. Paul Pollard, PhD. General Editor, Eddie Cloer, D. Min. Resource Publications, Searcy, AR. 2018.