

THE EPISTLES TO THE ROMANS

ROMANS 15:14-16:27, CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Romans

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B. Introduction to Romans 16

1. John Witmer, *The capital city of Rome was a magnet that drew people from all over the empire. In addition Paul's travels to many of the major population centers—Jerusalem, Syrian Antioch, Philippi, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus—brought him into contact with the mobile segment of Roman society. These factors help explain the presence of Paul's many friends in Rome, but his knowledge of their whereabouts remains a tribute to his deep concern for people.*
2. Douglas Mangum, *His greetings to them, while personal, also serve to reinforce his rhetorical authority by reference to Romans who can vouch for him.*
3. Grant Osborne, *Paul occasionally passes on his greetings to individuals (Col 4:15; 2 Tim 4:19), but nowhere else does he greet the number of people he does in chapter 16—twenty-six individuals, two families, and three house churches. Nine of these are women, and two hold offices: Phoebe is likely a deacon (see on v. 1), and Junia is "outstanding among the apostles" (in v. 7).*

ROMANS 16:1-16, MINISTRY CONCERNS

A. A commendation (1-2), *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, 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.*

1. Phoebe

- a. She was the courier of Paul's letter to the church at Rome.
- b. Paul refers to her as *our sister* which would confirm her as a Christian and church member.
- c. Her description as a *servant of the church at Cenchreae* probably meant that she was probably a deacon in the church.
 - 1) R. E. Perry, *Whether (servant) here signifies (1) a definite office or merely (2) social service to a community is unknown.*
 - 2) Douglas Moo, *We put "office" in quotation marks because it is very likely that regular offices in local Christian churches were still in the process of being established, as people who regularly ministered in a certain way were gradually recognized officially by the congregation and given a regular title.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *Notice that the ministry of women in the Roman church is quite evident in this chapter. Paul referred to nine prominent women: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Tryphena, Thyphosa, Persis, Rufus' mother, Julia, and Nereus' sister.*

2. *Cenchreae*

- a. It was a small seaport of Corinth on the eastern side of the Isthmus of Corinth, eight miles from Corinth.
- b. Paul shaved his head in Cenchreae before sailing for Syria, Acts 18:18, *After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.*



3. Paul appealed to the church in Rome to graciously welcome her.

- a. It was a letter of recommendation of Phoebe by Paul to the church in Rome.
- b. They should welcome her in a worthy manner, C. E. B. Cranfield, *Paul wants the Christians in Rome to welcome her 'in the Lord', that is, as Christians receiving a fellow-Christian, beloved for the Lord's sake.*
- c. It should include ministering to her needs, whatever they may be, Douglas Moo, *The "matter" on which Phoebe requires assistance cannot be determined, although it is possible that a legal dispute is involved.*
- d. A warm welcome with support would be appropriate because she had been a patron to Paul and many others.
 - 1) The word *patron* is only used here in the New Testament and carries the meaning of a helper in the sense of a benefactor, one supporting an individual or endeavor.
 - 2) Douglas Moo, *A "patron" was one who came to the aid of others, especially foreigners, by providing housing and financial aid and by representing their interests before local authorities. Cenchreae's status as a busy seaport would make it imperative that a Christian in its church take up this ministry on behalf of visiting Christians.*
 - 3) John Stott, *Phoebe was evidently a woman of means, who had used her wealth to support the church and the apostle.*
 - 4) Grant Osborne, *...she was a leader in the church (again, like Lydia) and worthy of all the assistance the church at Rome could render her.*

B. Greeting to Christians in Rome (3-16)

1. Prisca and Aquila (3-4), ***Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 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.***
 - a. They were a Jewish married couple from Pontus on the Black Sea coast, near Bithynia.
 - b. Prisca was named Priscilla in Acts 18:18, 26.
 - c. D. E. Hiebert, *Four out of six times her name stands before that of Aquila...This prominence has been explained as due to her superior ability and zeal, or that she had a higher social standing than Aquila as a member of an old Roman family.*

- d. William Barclay, *There is just the possibility that...Prisca was not a freedwoman at all but a great lady, a member by birth of the Acilian family. It may be that, at some meeting of the Christians, this great Roman lady met Aquila, the humble Jewish tent-maker, that the two fell in love, that Christianity destroyed the barriers of race, rank, wealth and birth, and that these two, the Roman aristocrat and the Jewish artisan, were joined forever in Christian love and Christian service.*
 - e. They went to Corinth from Rome.
 - 1) Probably, they left Rome because of the edict by Emperor Claudius (49/50 A. D.), which expelled Jews from Rome.
 - 2) Suetonius, *Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Crestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from the city.*
 - 3) Homer Kent, *It was commonly supposed that Suetonius was referring to riots in the Jewish community over the preaching of Christ, but that he has misspelled the name and has perhaps erroneously thought that Christ was actually a rebel leader in Rome.*
 - 4) Paul met the couple in Corinth on his second missionary journey, Acts 18:2, working with them at their trade of tent-making, Acts 18:3.
 - f. Paul took them with him to Ephesus, Acts 18:18.
 - 1) Paul left them there when he traveled to Jerusalem, Acts 18:19.
 - 2) Prisca and Aquila helped Apollos better understand important doctrinal issues, Acts 18:24-28.
 - 3) Prisca and Aquila returned to Rome and returned later to Ephesus, 2 Timothy 4:19.
 - g. Paul held Prisca and Aquila in high regard.
 - 1) He considered them fellow workers in Christ Jesus.
 - 2) He declared that they risked their lives for him. The circumstances surrounding his statement are unknown but it was possible that it was at the time of the riot in Ephesus, Acts 19:23-41.
 - 3) Paul and all the churches where they served gave thanks for the couple.
 - 4) William Hendriksen, *But even though Prisca and Aquila in a sense stood closer to him than any others—for they were his companions both in trade and in faith—as far as the record shows, between Paul, on the one hand, and Prisca and Aquila, on the other, there was always perfect harmony!*
2. Church meeting at Prisca and Aquila's house (5a), ***Greet also the church in their house.***
- a. The fellowship of Christians normally met in houses at this time.
 - 1) Romans 16:23, *Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.*
 - 2) 1 Corinthians 16:19, *The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.*
 - 3) Philemon 2, *and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:*
 - 4) John Witmer, *This couple had had a house church in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19) and probably wherever they lived.*
 - 5) Grant Osborne, *The use of homes for churches was universal until Constantine legalized Christianity in the fourth century.*
3. Epaenetus (5b), ***Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.***
- a. He is only mentioned here in the New Testament.
 - b. Douglas Moo, *By calling him "my beloved one," Paul suggests that he knows him personally. But we should not overinterpret "beloved" since Paul clearly tries to say something complimentary about every person he greets.*
 - c. *first convert*
 - 1) The word in Greek is *firstfruits*.
 - 2) William Hendriksen, *The very expression "firstfruits" implies that many others were to follow, which was actually what happened (Acts 19:10, 20).*
 - 3) He was the first convert in Asia in which Ephesus was the capital. The first converts in Achaia (Greece) are mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:15, *Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—*
 - d. D. E. Hiebert, *Such senior Christians naturally assumes positions of leadership in the Church. That Epaenetus was an accepted leader is implied in Paul's mention of him immediately after Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila.*
 - e. He may have been evangelized by Prisca and Aquila before Paul returned to Ephesus, Acts 18:27.

4. Mary (6), ***Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.***
 - a. Some manuscripts have *Mariam*, the Hebrew form for Mary.
 - b. It is uncertain whether she was a Jew or Gentile.
 - c. C. E. B. Cranfield, ... *her much labouring was for the good of the Roman Christians, not a service rendered specially to Paul and his companions.*
 - d. Grant Osborne, *The term "work" doesn't indicate any particular ministry but indicates she was a tireless laborer. Still, since she is the first described this way (cf. v. 12), she obviously played an important role in the life of the church there.*

5. Andronicus and Junia (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.***
 - a. There has been much discussion on the relationship of Andronicus to Junia, a reasonable conclusion is that they were husband and wife.
 - b. They were possibly Hellenistic Jews who came to faith in Jerusalem.
 - 1) That would explain how they were *well known to the apostles*. Some translations have *outstanding among the apostles*. If that is the appropriate translation, *apostles* would probably refer to *traveling missionaries not the twelve plus Paul*.
 - 2) Also, it would explain how they came to faith in Christ before Paul as noted by William Barclay, *Paul says that Andronicus and Junias were Christians before he was. That means that they must go right back to the time of Stephen; they must have been a direct link with the earliest Church at Jerusalem.*
 - c. Douglas Moo, *whether they were in prison with Paul at the same time or simply shared with him this kind of experience in the service of the Lord is impossible to say.*
 - d. They may have been expelled from Jerusalem in the persecution noted in Acts 8:1-3, *And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*

6. Ampliatus (8), ***Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.***
 - a. His name was common in ancient Rome and occurs as a slave name for the imperial household.
 - 1) It was found twice in the cemetery of Domitillia in Rome. The oldest of the two was dated from the end of the 1st century A.D.
 - 2) Consider C. E. B. Cranfield's consideration that the 1st century tomb was that of this man named in Romans 16:8, *Its character suggests that it is the tomb of someone who was specially esteemed. There seems to be a real possibility—we cannot put it more strongly—that this Ampliatus is the person greeted by Paul, and that it may have been through him—probably a slave—that the gospel first penetrated into the noble household to which Flavia Domitilla, the Emperor Domitian's niece and wife of Flavius Clemens, belonged.*
 - 3) William Barclay concerning the tomb of Ampliatus, *...the elaborate tomb and the bold lettering would indicate that he was a man of high rank in the Church. From this, it is plain to see that, in the early days of the Church, the distinctions of rank were so completely wiped out that it was possible for someone at one and the same time to be a slave and to hold a position of responsibility in the Church. Social distinctions did not exist.*
 - b. *my beloved in the Lord*
 - 1) This was high praise from the apostle Paul which was only given to Epaenetus, Stachys and Persis on this list of greetings.
 - 2) If he was a part of the emperor's household he would be esteemed in society and the church.

7. Urbanus and Stachys (9), ***Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.***
 - a. Urbanus
 - 1) C. E. B. Cranfield, *'Urbanus' is another common Roman slave name, found among members of the imperial household.*
 - 2) Paul may have only known him by reputation since his address was *our fellow worker*.

- b. Stachys
 - 1) An inscription of Stachys was found which was linked to the imperial household in this time-frame.
 - 2) Paul must have worked alongside Stachys based on his address *my beloved Stachys*.
8. Apelles (10a), ***Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.***
- a. The name was used by Gentiles as well as Jews.
 - b. *Approved*
 - 1) It carries the weight of *being respected on the weight of proven worth; the one approved through testing.*
 - 2) Romans 14:18, *Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.*
 - 3) 2 Timothy 2:15, *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*
 - 4) Douglas Moo, *Paul honors him by saying that he is “approved” in Christ. By this Paul might mean that he had proved himself in a difficult test of faith or, simply, that he was a respected believer.*
 - 5) Grant Osborne, *We don’t know the circumstances that led Paul to call him this, but it must have been well known in the Roman church.*
9. Family of Aristobulus (10b), ***Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.***
- a. *Those who belong to the family* were probably slaves and/or relatives of Aristobulus.
 - b. Douglas Moo, *By not greeting Aristobulus directly, Paul implies that he was not a believer. Indeed, he may be dead since there is some reason to identify this Aristobulus with the brother of King Herod Agrippa I; and this Aristobulus died in A.D. 48 or 49.*
 - c. William Barclay, *In Rome, for some time there had lived a grandson of Herod the Great whose name was Aristobulus. He had lived always as a private individual and had inherited none of Herod’s territories; but he was a close friend of the Emperor Claudius. When he died, his servants and slaves would become the property of the emperor, but they would form a section of his establishment known as the household of Aristobulus.*
10. Herodion (11a), ***Greet my kinsman Herodion.***
- a. He was a kinsman, a Jew, as were Andronicus and Junia (verse 7).
 - b. D. E. Hiebert, *The name suggests that he may have been a freedman of the Herods, or possibly a member of the household of Aristobulus (10).*
 - c. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The fact that Paul next mentions someone called Herodion, a name which naturally suggests a connexion (probably a slave or freedman) of the Herod family, may perhaps be some support for the suggestion that the Aristobulus of v. 10 belonged to the family of Herod.*
11. Family of Narcissus (11b), ***Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.***
- a. John Witmer, *...Paul restricted his greetings to the ones who are in the Lord, which probably indicated Narcissus’ family was divided spiritually.*
 - b. C. E. B. Cranfield, *...that the Narcissus referred to is the notorious freedman of the Emperor Claudius, whose wealth was proverbial (cf. Juvenal, 14.329) and whose influence with Claudius had been practically unlimited, but who had been forced to commit suicide by Agrippina shortly after Nero’s accession and only a year or two before Paul was writing, seems to us quite probable.*
 - c. J. B. Lightfoot, *We seem to have established a fair presumption that among the salutations in the Epistle to the Romans some members at least of the imperial household are included.*
 - d. William Barclay, *If Aristobulus really is the Aristobulus who was the grandson of Herod, and if Narcissus really is the Narcissus who was Claudius’ secretary, this means that many of the slaves at the imperial court were already Christians. The leaven of Christianity had reached the highest circles in the empire.*
 - e. Note Philippians 4:2, *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.*
12. Tryphena and Tryphosa (12a), ***Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa.***
- a. These were slaves or freedwomen who probably had the gift of helps due to Paul’s greeting.
 - b. The Greek word Paul used for *workers* comes from the verb *to toil to the point of exhaustion*.
 - c. It is thought that they were twins or close relatives due to the similarity of their names, Tryphaena (*dainty*) and Tryphosa (*delicate*).
 - d. William Barclay, *You two may be called dainty and delicate; but you belie your names by working like Trojans for the sake of Christ.’ We can well imagine a twinkle in Paul’s eye as he dictated that greeting.*
 - e. J. B. Lightfoot, *Both names occur among slaves at the imperial court of Claudius and they have been found in a cemetery used chiefly for emperor’s servants.*

13. Persis (12b), ***Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.***
- Douglas Moo, *The name comes from "Persia" and perhaps denotes a slave captured in that region.*
 - C. E. B. Cranfield, *Persis is specially warmly commended. She is beloved and has laboured much in the Lord.*
 - Grant Osborne, *Her greeting is unusual in that she has a double commendation, combining the "beloved" of verses 5 and 8 with the "worked hard in the Lord" of verses 6, 12a.*
 - It is said that since Paul said *the beloved* instead of *my beloved*, the emphasis must be that he only knew of her but not personally.
14. Rufus and his mother (13), ***Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.***
- Rufus*
 - The word *chosen* may mean *eminent* with emphasis on his position of authority in the church. Yet, it may be a confirmation of his being elect like every other Christian.
 - The name Rufus appears here and in 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.*
 - It can't be confirmed that this Rufus is the son of Simon of Cyrene.
 - Grant Osborne, *Mark's naming his sons means they were well known to his readers. Since most believe that the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome, that would indicate Alexander and Rufus were prominent Christian leaders there.*
 - William Barclay, *We can weave all kinds of speculations about this. It was men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and first preached the gospel to the Gentile world (Acts 11:20). Was Simon one of the men from Cyrene? Was Rufus with him? Was it they who took the first tremendous step to make Christianity the faith of a whole world? Was it they who helped the Church break the bonds of Judaism? Can it be that, in some sense, we today owe the fact that we are Christians to the strange episode when a man from Cyrene was compelled to carry a cross on the road to Calvary?*
 - his mother*
 - John Witmer, *Paul obviously did not say she was his actual mother, but he had been the recipient of her motherly care.*
 - C. E. B. Cranfield, *...we may presume that on some occasion Rufus's mother had befriended Paul in a motherly way, and that this is Paul's graceful acknowledgment and expression of his grateful affection.*
15. Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and brothers and sisters with them (14), ***Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.***
- The names are those of slaves or freedmen.
 - These men are probably members of a house church in Rome.
 - Probably, Paul had contact with the named individuals but wanted to greet *the brothers* who were also part of that group, as well.
16. Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them (15), ***Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.***
- Philologus and Julia were possibly husband and wife who hosted a church in their home.
 - Nereus and his sister were possibly the children of Philologus and Julia.
 - Olympas and *all the saints* are possibly the other Christians who met at the house church.
 - William Barclay, *In AD 95, an event occurred which shocked Rome. Two of the most distinguished people in the city were condemned for being Christians. They were Flavius Clemens, who had been consul of Rome, and his wife Domatilla, who was of royal blood...Flavius was executed and Domatilla was banished to the island of Pontia where, years afterwards, the fourth-century saint, Paula, saw the cave where 'she drew out a long martyrdom for the Christian name'...The point is this: the name of the chamberlain of Flavius and Domatilla was Nereus. Is it possible that Nereus the slave had something to do with the conversion to Christianity of Flavius Clemens, the ex-consul, and Domatilla, the princess of the royal blood?...Flavius Clemens was the son of Flavius Sabinus, who had been Nero's city prefect when Nero sadistically persecuted the Christians after charging them with being responsible for the appalling fire which devastated Rome in AD 64...It was then that Nero ordered the Christians to be rolled in pitch and set alight to form living torches for his gardens, to be sewn into the skins of wild beasts and flung to savage hunting dogs, and to be shut up in ships which were sunk in the Tiber. Is it possible that, thirty years before he died for Christ, the young Flavius Clemens had seen the fearless courage of the martyrs and wondered what made men and women able to die like that?*

17. General greetings (16), *Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*
- a. *holy kiss*
 - 1) It was a greeting similar to the handshake today but with the force of unity of purpose, a kiss for all members of Christ's body, 1 Thessalonians 5:26, *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.*
 - 2) Paul included this greeting in 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26 and 1 Peter 5:14.
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *...Paul may here be envisaging a worship gathering in which his letter is being read aloud and which is concluded with such a kiss.*
 - 4) John Stott, The logic is that our verbal greeting needs to be confirmed by a visible and tangible gesture, although *what form the 'kiss' should take will vary according to culture...Tertullian seems to have been the first to call it a 'kiss of peace.'*
 - b. All the churches Paul represented sent greetings to the churches in Rome.
 - 1) Douglas Moo, *Paul refers to those churches that he has been instrumental in planting in his ministry "from Jerusalem to Illyricum." By conveying greetings from so many of the churches, Paul again hints at his strategy to bring the Roman church into the sphere of churches that know and support him.*
 - 2) John Stott, *Since he is about to set sail for Jerusalem, we know that those appointed by the churches to carry and deliver the offering have just assembled in Corinth. Luke tells us that they included delegates from Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, Lystra and Ephesus. Perhaps he has asked them if he may send their churches' greetings to Rome.*

CONCLUSION

- A. There is unity in the churches of Rome despite diversity. The body of Christ in Rome was composed of men, women, slaves, freedmen, poor and wealthy.
- B. What a testimony to the world in that day and conviction to so many churches of our day.
- C. Paul must have praised the Lord continually at the thought of churches picturing his hope of Ephesians 2:14, *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*