



## Greetings, Warnings, and Blessings Romans 16

### Introduction

Romans has been a lengthy epistle filled with divine doctrine and exhortation. Paul has revealed God's righteousness, His plan for bringing men and women into His kingdom, and His expectations of those who are His. God has lavished His grace, mercy, and love upon those He has chosen and He calls them to live new lives which reflect the righteousness and blessed hope which is theirs in Jesus Christ. How could any Christian help but do so, in love, joy, and gratitude for all God has done!

How truly blessed we are to have this letter explaining God's sovereignty, holiness, glory, justice, mercy, and love, whose words were dictated by the apostle Paul, written down by his scribe Tertius, (Romans 16:22) but inspired and directed by power of the Holy Spirit. Even Paul's personal closing comments in chapter 16 reflect the glory of God and stir the heart of the reader to love, good works, discernment, and praise.

In his closing words, Paul sends greetings to individuals whom he knew (or knew of) who were part of the church in Rome. It is not at all tedious to read through the list of names. Paul's greetings give interesting insights into the people who made up the Roman church. It is also a joy to meet some of those to whom Paul was writing! They were real people, ordinary people, just as those who make up the church in any city of the 21st century. Paul singles out 26 people, at least 9 of whom are women. He has a special comment for each one. In addition, he makes mention of the believers in two particular households and three house churches. "This is the most extensive and intimate expression of Paul's love and affection for other believers and co-workers found anywhere in his New Testament letters" (The MacArthur Study Bible, John MacArthur).

Following the greetings, Paul gives a warning against false teachers. The Roman church was known for its obedience, and that filled him with joy. But he did not want false teachers and false doctrines to deceive the faithful believers. He desired the Roman Christians to be established in the grace of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Outline of Romans 16

- I. Personal Greetings - Romans 16:1-16
- II. Final Exhortation and Benediction - Romans 16:17-27

### I. Personal Greetings - Romans 16:1-16

In the first century, personal letters were sent by messenger. It is most probable that Phoebe, the woman mentioned in Romans 16:1, was the one entrusted with taking Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

#### A. Commendation of Phoebe - Romans 16:1-2

Paul asked the Roman believers to welcome Phoebe *in a manner worthy of the saints* and help her if she had any needs. As a fellow believer, they were to treat her as part of the family of believers in Rome. In these two verses, we learn three important things about Phoebe: she was a *sister*, a *servant*, and a *helper*. "Paul no doubt emphasizes Phoebe's spiritual qualifications for two reasons: Jewish and Greco-Roman circles did not usually have high regard for women's religious wisdom; and she will need to minister to them, explaining to them by word of mouth anything in Paul's letter that the hearers would not understand" (The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Craig S. Keener).

#### 1. Sister - 16:1

Paul calls Phoebe *our sister*. She was his sister in Christ and also theirs, a part of the family of Christ.

#### 2. Servant of the church in Cenchrea - 16:1

The Greek word "diakonon", translated *servant*, usually refers to a minister of God's word. However, it is also sometimes translated "deacon", as in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8, 10, and 12, so Phoebe may have been a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea. The fact that Paul describes her as a *servant of the church* suggests that she held an official position in the church. This is the first time the word *church* is mentioned in Romans.

Cenchrea was a seaport city just a few miles east of Corinth, the city from which Paul wrote this letter.

#### 3. A helper of many and of myself also - 16:2

As a servant of the church, Phoebe was helpful to many and also a helper to Paul personally. We have no details of the helpful things Phoebe had done, but if she was a deaconess, she would have ministered to the poor, the sick, the elderly, the younger women, and needy widows. She may also have helped Paul by contributing to his support or in spreading the gospel message.

## B. Friends in Rome - Romans 16:3-16

Paul showed his high esteem and love for the following people by sending them his personal greetings.

1. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers* - 16:3-5

This wife and husband were originally from Rome, but when the Emperor, Claudius, issued an edict for all Jews to leave the city, they had moved to Corinth. They met Paul there during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:2) and invited him to stay with them and work with them since they were all tentmakers by trade. When Paul traveled on to Ephesus, they went with him (Acts 18:18) and remained there to minister when Paul left for Antioch (Acts 18:26). Since that time, Claudius had died, his edict had been annulled, and Priscilla and Aquila had returned home to Rome.

Paul describes them as his *fellow workers*, obviously in helping with the spread of the gospel. They had risked their lives for Paul's and he thanked them. In fact, *all the churches of the Gentiles gave thanks to them*.

Paul also sends greetings to *the church that is in their house*. In those days, churches normally met in homes since there were no church buildings as we have today. Priscilla and Aquila had also hosted a church in their home in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:19).

2. *Greet my beloved Epaphroditus* - 16:5

Paul loved all Christians, but when he calls Epaphroditus his *beloved*, it denotes that he is a very dear friend. In fact he was the first Christian convert (*firstfruits...to Christ*) in Achaia. Some manuscripts read *Asia* instead of *Achaia*.

3. *Greet Mary who labored much for us* - 16:6

Paul commends Mary for her Christian service which was rendered to him and his fellow workers.

4. *Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners* - 16:7

These two were most likely husband and wife. Junia is a Latin name and this means that she was probably a Roman citizen. When Paul calls them his *countrymen*, he means that they were fellow Jews. They had also been *fellow prisoners*, meaning either that they had shared an imprisonment with Paul or that they also had experienced imprisonment for the gospel.

a. *Who are of note among the apostles* - 16:7

This can mean either that they had a notable reputation in the eyes of the apostles or that they were known as apostles in a wider sense "(in contrast to the narrower reference to the twelve apostles) as denoting those itinerant missionaries who were recognized by the churches as constituting a distinct group among the participants in the work of spreading the gospel" (*Romans, A Shorter Commentary*, C.E.B. Cranfield). Another example of one called an apostle in this wider sense is Barnabas (Acts 14:14).

b. *Who were also in Christ before me* - 16:7

Andronicus and Junia were very early believers, having been converted to Christianity before Paul.

5. *Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord* - 16:8

Amplias was another dear Christian friend of Paul's.

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

Both of these names are very common slave names. Urbanus had worked with Paul in spreading the gospel and Stachys was another special friend.

7. *Greet Apelles, approved in Christ* - 16:10

Apelles was a mature Christian. The fact that he was *approved* in Christ means that he had undergone trials or testing in his service for Christ and had endured and stood firm.

8. *Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus* - 16:10

Aristobulus was probably not a believer since Paul does not greet him personally. But some of his family and servants had become Christians. This may have been the Aristobulus who was the grandson of Herod the Great. He lived in Rome and was a close friend of the Emperor, Claudius.

9. *Greet Herodian, my countryman* - 16:11

Herodian was also a fellow Jew and may have belonged to Herod's family or been a freed slave. Freed slaves often took the name of their former master.

10. *Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus* - 16:11

Like Aristobulus (16:10), Narcissus was probably not a believer, although some in his household were. Narcissus may have been the secretary of the Emperor, Claudius. He was a very wealthy and influential man at court, but had been forced to commit suicide shortly after the emperor's death. At that time, his slaves would have passed to the new emperor and been designated by the name Narcissus.

11. *Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord* - 16:12

These two were probably sisters, perhaps even twins, who were noted for their work in the church. Their names mean "delicate" and "dainty".

12. *Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord* - 16:12

Persis was another woman who worked hard in the church. She was also a dear friend of Paul.

13. *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine* - 16:13

Although Rufus was a common Latin name, he might possibly be the same Rufus of Mark 15:21, one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried the cross for Jesus. Since all believers are *chosen in the Lord*, Paul probably means that Rufus is a choice believer. The New American Standard Bible translation reads *a choice man in the Lord*. This is a very high compliment.

Paul also greets Rufus' mother whom he refers to as *mine*. Apparently, she had cared for Paul like a mother cares for her son. She may also have helped financially in his ministry.

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

These were probably leaders of a house church, like the church that met in the home of Priscilla and Aquilla.

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

These were most likely leaders of another house church. Philologus and Julia may have been husband and wife, and the church may have met in their home.

- C. *Greet one another with a holy kiss* - 16:16

The *holy kiss* was a common greeting, just as a handshake or a hug are today. It was a reminder of Christian unity.

## II. Final Exhortation and Benediction - Romans 16:17-27

Paul closes his letter with a final warning and a blessing.

- A. Warning against false teachers - Romans 16:17-20

Paul urges the Roman Christians to *note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned* (16:17). Paul wants them to be very aware that people like this might come into the church. They are not to be casual in their attitude toward such people. Christians are to be very particular about doctrine. When teachings contrary to what Paul has taught in this letter creep into a church, there will be divisions between those who hold to the doctrine which you learned and those who stumble because of the false teaching. The word *offenses* translates the Greek word "skandalon" which literally means "a snare" or "a trap". False teachers cause divisions because their teaching is a snare which causes some to stumble.

1. *Avoid them* - 16:17

The proper reaction to false teachers who cause dissensions and stumbling is to *turn away* (NASB) from them or literally "keep out of their way".

2. *For those...do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly* - 16:18

Verse 18 explains why false teachers are a real threat. They do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, they serve their *own belly*. Paul may be referring to a preoccupation with food laws, or indiscriminate self-indulgence, or a greed arising out of general egotism. "These people promote their own agenda and teaching and soon begin to think their own way is more important than God's" (Chrysostom, as quoted in The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

3. *By smooth words and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the simple* - 16:18

The false teachers' words and manner of speech entice those who are naive or unsuspecting. Those who do not have a solid understanding of truth and what is good or evil are easy prey for deceivers.

4. *I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil* - 16:19

Paul praises the Roman Christians for their obedience which had *become known to all*. They had a good reputation and Paul was glad for that, but he wants them to continue to live up to it. Therefore they need to be diligent in their discernment. They need to be aware and ready to stand against false teaching. Charles Hodge takes the phrase *be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil* to mean that they should be "too good to deceive, and too wise to be deceived" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans).

5. *The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly* - 16:20

God is the *God of peace* because He is the author of the peace that we enjoy as Christians. "The Apostle here encourages the believers to sustain the combat against Satan, their mortal enemy, who does everything in his power to disturb their peace, and to tempt them to evil" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane). Paul encourages perseverance because the opposition will surely be defeated!

- B. Paul's personal closing greeting - Romans 16:20b

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.* This is what is known as Paul's "autograph authentication" of his letter. Since Paul dictated to a scribe, the letter was not written in his own handwriting. This concluding greeting was written personally by Paul to show that the letter was truly from him, just as people close letters with a personal signature today.

Paul always closed his epistles with *grace*. "In the New Testament, grace denotes God's undeserved love revealed in Christ and may be said to sum up the whole gospel in a single word" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

- C. "P.S." - Romans 16:21-23

Paul's friends in Corinth added a post script to send their greetings at the end of the letter. As in the greeting to the Roman believers, Paul gives a personal comment about each one.

1. *Timothy, my fellow worker* - 16:21

Paul met Timothy in Lystra during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3), took an immediate liking to him, and asked him to join him in ministry. Timothy served with Paul *in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father* (Philippians 2:20-

22, NASB). The Philippians passage also records that Paul found Timothy to be *of kindred spirit and of proven worth*. Timothy is mentioned in almost all of Paul's letters and was the recipient of two personal letters from Paul which are also in the New Testament.

2. *Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you* - 16:21

In referring to these three men as *my countrymen*, Paul denotes that they are Jewish (as in Romans 16:7 and 11) Lucius may have been the man from Cyrene mentioned in Acts 13:1 and possibly Jason had been Paul's brave host in Thessalonica. See Acts 17:5-9.

3. *I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord* - 16:22

Tertius was Paul's amanuensis, the scribe who wrote for him. Nothing more is known of him, but perhaps he was acquainted with some of the Roman Christians.

4. *Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you* - 16:23

Gaius may have been Paul's convert whom he baptized. See 1 Corinthians 1:14. He was Paul's host in Corinth and also hosted the church in his home.

5. *Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother* - 16:23

The word *treasurer* is literally "the city's steward". This was a very high position in Corinth. Those who held it were usually wealthy.

Quartus was a spiritual brother of Paul and all who sent their greetings.

- D. Benediction - Romans 16:24-27

Paul closes his letter with a prayer which is also a blessing upon the Roman church. (Verse 24 is a repetition of 16:20b and is not found in early manuscripts.)

1. *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ* - 16:25

"From this we learn that establishment in the faith is not of ourselves, but of God. It requires the power of Jehovah to establish His people in the truth. So far from being able to bring themselves into the faith of the Gospel, they are not able to continue in it without God...Power to do anything in the service of God must be communicated from above" (Exposition of Romans, Robert Haldane).



Believers are established by the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. Here Paul calls it *my gospel*. "So closely united is Paul's mind, heart, will and ministry with that of Christ that he can legitimately call it his gospel... it manifests the wholehearted obedience and devotion to the gospel which was characteristic of all of Paul's ministry" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R. C. Sproul).

2. *According to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began - 16:25*

The message of the gospel of Christ was *hidden* in the Old Testament, as in Zechariah 2:11: *Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.* See also Isaiah 19:18-25 and 56:3-8. "The truth that the Son of God would come from heaven to live and die for us and that we enter into salvation only by faith in Him is not obvious and could be known by us only when and as God revealed it" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

3. *But now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations according to the commandment of the everlasting God for obedience to the faith - 16:26*

The mystery has now been revealed. The real meaning of the prophetic Scriptures has been made clear by the coming of Jesus Christ. This was done by the commandment of the everlasting (eternal) God, so that all might come to faith.

The apostle Peter also writes of this: *Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven* (1 Peter 1:10-12).

4. *To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever - 16:27*

God is the only God, and He is the only One who is wise. Glory is ascribed to Him forever. His glory will never cease. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:28, *Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* Soli Deo gloria! "The theme of the Protestant Reformation which was born through a study of the book of Romans was the theme "solus deo gloria"—to God alone the glory" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul).

5. *Amen - 16:27*

At the close of his commentary on the Book of Romans, Robert Haldane sounds the *Amen*. "We are now arrived at the conclusion of this most instructive epistle, in which our attention is so forcibly drawn to the consideration of 'the deep things of God.' On the one hand, the unbending justice of the infinitely holy God is awfully displayed, appearing like the flaming cherubim which guarded the way to the tree of life, and barred every avenue of hope to man as a transgressor. On the other hand, we behold the Divine compassion abounding in all wisdom and prudence, to the praise of the glory of God's grace, providing the glorious plan of redemption, in which mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. The righteousness of God, like the rainbow that was round about the throne, reveals all the glorious attributes of Jehovah, blended in one harmonious exhibition of unrivaled majesty" (Exposition of Romans).