



Paul's Letter to The Romans

A Commendation, 22 Greetings, A Warning, A Few Greetings from Others and A Benediction... Romans 16:1-27

We have come this morning to the concluding lesson in our present study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans and I, for one, cannot thank you enough for the chance to have worked my way again through this wonderful letter in your hearing. To be able to reread, to retranslate, to restudy and to rethink my way through Paul's arguments and purpose in this wonderful book...this Mount Everest of New Testament theology and thought has been a wonderful blessing to me and the fountain of a whole measure of sustaining grace during some fairly difficult times. Thank you again.

Now back when I first started this study, back in May of 2003, I told you that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans for a number of reasons. This is what I said:

Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans

- ...to prepare a church he did not know for an intended visit**
- ...by explaining the gospel he preached in order that they**
 - ...might be edified,**
 - ...be at peace with one another**
 - ...help him on his way to Spain**

Now I trust that you have gained enough of the understanding of the structure of Romans to see how that sentence includes the principal elements or thoughts that make up Romans. You should remember, by now, that chapters 1-11 focus on the great doctrine of justification and that chapters 12-15 focus on how Christians ought to live in light of having been justified.

Paul starts off the epistle by explaining that his gospel is the same old gospel preached and proclaimed by the prophets of old and then he turns to explain the universal sinfulness and need of mankind. That is, he explains why men need to be justified in the first place. Then starting in Romans 3:21, Paul begins to explain that God has provided in Christ the very righteousness that he demands. Paul begins to unfold there the glory of an imputed righteousness reckoned to sinners on the basis of faith alone and he holds up as examples both Abraham and David as sinners to whom God imputed righteousness on the basis of faith. In Romans 5:1 Paul comes to this wonderful conclusion:

^{ESV} **Romans 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then in chapters 6-8, Paul begins to talk about how justification begins to express itself in holy and righteous living in the life of a believer. It is not that the believer knows only victory, chapter seven takes care of that idea, but rather that the Spirit of God indwelling believers moves them ever along in their sanctification. Paul concludes the section with a wonderful summary thought:

^{ESV} **Romans 8:38**...For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord

What a wonderful conclusion that is!

Then in chapters 9-11, Paul addresses the question of unbelieving Jews and whether or not the promises of God can be trusted in light of the fact that God's covenant people, the Jews, have largely rejected the gospel. I don't want to go back through the whole argument but I would like to say that Paul's conclusion was that the promises of God can most certainly be trusted. In fact, Paul concludes chapter 11 with this wonderful expression of praise and worship:

^{ESV} **Romans 11:33**...Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

And you know that seems like a wonderful way to end his letter but that is only the end of the first half of the letter. Because, of course, Paul goes on in chapter twelve to draw a conclusion based upon the riches of the blessings contained in the act of having been justified and what he says is this, **"In light of the fact that you have been made to be at peace with God and have been redeemed both from the penalty and power of sin, you ought to live a certain way. In fact, you are obligated to live a certain way."**

That is the section we have been working our way through since last July. And what we saw was this...that living in light of having been justified involves offering our bodies up as **"living sacrifices."** Now the way we are to do that is

not thinking of ourselves too highly, but thinking of ourselves as gifted members of Christ's body called to participate and use the gifts we have been given. We are to give up being vindictive. We are to bless those that persecute us and we are to do that even as we obey governmental authorities and pay taxes. I don't care for that part but it's there.

We are to love our neighbors and the reason we are to do that is because it fulfills the law of God. Now that doesn't mean that everyone in the Body of Christ will look at things the same way. There are those who will feel a measure of freedom with regard to certain behaviors that others will never feel. Still, we are to do our best to accommodate each other as we are able. We are to defer to others when we can and we are to do that because we value what Christ values. The logic is pretty simple. If Christ loved someone enough to shed His blood for them shouldn't we be able to tolerate them and defer to them periodically. Since He showed us compassion oughtn't we to do the same.

And then finally in the second half of chapter 15, Paul explains to the Romans his travel plans. He explains why he had not come to see them sooner, why he couldn't come right away and why when he does finally come he won't be able to stay very long. We talked about all that last week and I expect it is still fresh or at least somewhat fresh in your mind.

Now what we are going to see in this concluding lesson is Paul's fond farewell to the Romans. Now I want you to know is that his goodbye here is really quite different than any of his other goodbyes in any of his other letters. In fact, it is really quite remarkable. It is different both in style and in length. Paul mentions nearly thirty different names from the congregation in Rome in this final chapter.

Now think about that. He had never visited the church in Rome but he knew almost thirty of the names of the members there.

Now the thing that is surprising about that is that he had never been there.

Now why did he name them and what does that tell you about this great man?

We'll talk about that as we work our way through Paul's list of names. But before we do that I thought I might give you once again my working title so you can follow along based upon what I think is contained in the chapter. Do you know what I mean? Alright then, here is my working title for this morning, **"A Commendation, 22 Greetings, A Warning, A Few Greetings From Others And A Benediction."**

Let me repeat it one more time, **"A Commendation, 22 Greetings, A Warning, A Few Greetings From Others And A Benediction."**

Now rather than read the chapter through all the way from the beginning I think I will read the verses a few at a time as we work our way through them. Alright then, let's start at Romans 16:1-2 and notice how Paul begins by offering a commendation.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:1**...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.

Now the first question that ought to come to your mind is this, **“Who was Phoebe?”** I mean it’s crystal clear she was not a part of the Roman church. In fact, Paul goes on to say that she is a **“servant”** of the church in Cenchrea. That in turn raises two other questions. The first question it raises is, **“What does Paul mean when he calls her a ‘servant’?** I bring that up because he uses the word *διάκονος* when he describes her. Now the second question it raises is, **“Where was Cenchrea located and why was Phoebe in Rome in the first place?”** Now if you link all those things together, the question becomes, **“Who was Phoebe, why is she so far from home, why does Paul feel the need to commend her to the Romans?”**

Now who was Phoebe?

Now the first thing that ought to be obvious to you is that Phoebe was a woman. After all, Paul calls her a sister which means that she was a believer and that she enjoyed a measure of Paul’s esteem and affection.

Now secondly you ought to know that Cenchrea was a seaport town a few miles to the east of Corinth. Corinth was an important town on a peninsula that stretched out into the Mediterranean. This narrow peninsula was very dangerous to sail around in winter and since it was only five miles or so wide at Corinth many ships offloaded their cargo on side of the peninsula and had it shipped overland and loaded again on the other side. Smaller boats were actually lifted out of the water and carried by carts over land and put back in the water on the western side. Over a period of time, the port of Corinth began to silt up and a new port was created at Cenchrea. It might be helpful to think of Corinth as a huge metropolitan city and Cenchrea as a harbor town.

Now that tells us a couple of things. First off it tells us almost certainly that Phoebe was a member of the church of Corinth and it means, most likely, that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans from Corinth.

Now none of that is controversial. What is somewhat controversial is that Paul refers to Phoebe as a *διάκονος* of the church at Cenchrea. Now the question is, **“Does that mean that she was officially a ‘deaconess’ or did that mean that she simply fulfilled the role of a fellow servant?”** I will tell you that people are most likely to make their determination regarding that depending upon how it suits their purpose. That is, if they want to see female officers in the church they say, **“Look here, right here the New Testament tells you that this woman was a ‘deacon.’”** While others, opposing the idea of female officers in the church argue that the word here simply means servant and is not referring to the office by title. I, for one, have no problem with seeing Phoebe as a **“deaconess”** so long as the other restrictions that apply to the ministry of women and that are outlined in 1 Corinthians, a church to which she almost certainly belonged to and worshipped with, were kept in mind. But to conclude that she was a **“deacon”** in the same sense as the official office of a **“deacon”** as it is outlined in 1 Timothy 3 or that she was the pastor of the church at Cenchrea which some of the more modern feminists exegetes do, is a little more than the text can bear. It is a little like hearing someone say, **“Well when I was sick Joan ministered to me,”** and determining from that that Joan is the senior minister or pastor in their church.

That is the problem with that word *διάκονος*. It can mean the official office or it can mean simply a **“servant.”** In that sense, of course, we are all *διάκονος*. Still we have elected **“deacons”** set apart to do a certain job and fulfill the role of mercy and mercy ministry.

Still the answer to that question might be helped along by considering two other questions, namely, **“Why was Phoebe in Rome and why was Paul commending her to the Romans?”**

I think the answer to that question is that she was delivering the letter Paul had written to the Romans. Now, consider that for a moment. The single more important theological letter or treatise in the history of the world was couriered not by a professional courier or even a pastor but by a woman. And I think you could add to that idea that Paul knew full well the importance of the letter he had written and that it was very important to him to make sure that the Romans received the letter promptly in order that he in turn might receive their kind assessment to help him on his way to Spain in the west. Still, he entrusted it to a woman to deliver and, of course, many of you women are thinking to yourselves right now, **“Well why not? If one wants something done right and proper why not entrust it to a woman?”**

And to that, I would have to reply, **“Why not, indeed?”**

Still I have to admit that in that day it was a remarkable thing to commit such a thing to a woman. The world they lived in was a lot different than the world we live in. That is why, I think, Paul calls upon the Romans to protect her and give her a place to stay and to help provide for her on her way home when she leaves. They are to do that because she has been a great help to a great many people, not the least of which includes the Apostle Paul himself.

Now, that fact caused me to wonder whether perhaps sometimes you women are fully aware of the importance of the role you play in the Body of Christ? I

wonder sometimes if you realize the value the Lord Jesus Himself has placed upon women and how he freed them from a world of tedium and brought them into a place of honor and respectability?

Clearly this woman was wonderfully important to Paul and was deemed to be extremely trustworthy and yet this is the only place in the Bible she is named. But there is a wonderful lesson to be learned and here and this is it. There is wonderful opportunity for what I think it might be wise to call **“the ministry of the shadows.”** You see Phoebe understood her role and she embraced it and was willing to do so because she understood how doing so might be able to contribute to the larger picture. I would just say to you ladies that the Lord Jesus Himself sees your deeds and sees your prayers and sees your kind words and notes of encouragement and He remembers each of them and because of that you are important and precious to the ministry of this local church, to the ministry of any church, and the church as a whole. Do not be discouraged if you feel at times you are unrecognized or overlooked. You are not. Even if your work is shadow work it is near and dear to the heart of God.

I remember hearing Dr. McGee talking about a godly woman in his church in Los Angeles who died. One of the staff members of the church didn't know her very well and asked Dr. McGee, **“Dr. McGee, do you expect we'll see her in heaven?”**

“No,” Dr. McGee replied, **“I don't expect we will.”**

The young assistant was somewhat surprised by Dr. McGee's answer and asked, **“So then, you don't think she'll be in heaven?”**

“Oh no,” relied Dr. McGee, **“she’ll be there alright. It’s just that she’ll be so far up near the front and we’ll be so far near the back that I don’t expect we’ll get to see her quite some time.”**

That is the role of ministry of women in the church. I love that and I expect and know that it is just as true for us here at Grace Community Presbyterian as it was for the Church of the Open Door in Dr. McGee’s day.

Now starting in verse three, Paul begins a series of 22 greetings. And he starts with someone that we know that he knows...Aquila and Priscilla. Now as we look at verses 3-5, I want you to notice what he says about them and really he says quite a lot. He is going to say they are his fellow workers. He is going to say they put their lives a risk for him. He is going to say they known and loved by all of the Gentile churches and finally he finally he is going to say they are still very much involved in that a church meets in their house.

Alright then, let’s read verses 3-5.

Rome

^{ESV} **Romans 16:3...**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.

⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Now the content of what he says is really quite simple. So let me ask you this, **“Where are Aquila and Priscilla when Paul wrote this letter?”** Well, of course, they are in Rome. Now I bring that up because they are mentioned quite a few times I other places in the New Testament. Look for example at Acts 18:1.

Corinth

^{ESV} **Acts 18:1**...After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

Now where did they start out? Where does the passage say they started out? It says they started out in Italy, specifically they started out in Rome and they expelled from the city by an imperial edict. Also, it says that they were Jewish. They wouldn't have been expelled otherwise. Now skip down to Acts 18:18.

Ephesus

^{ESV} **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. ¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Now here you see that that Aquila and Priscilla started off in Rome and then moved to Corinth and met Paul and lived with him awhile. After about a year and a half, they accompanied Paul to Cenchrea, the home of Phoebe and then they went on with him to Ephesus. Notice too that they stayed there when Paul left. But that doesn't mean that they weren't busy. Look down to Acts 18:24.

^{ESV} **Acts 18:24**...Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Now did you get that? Paul went on but they stayed in Ephesus and they found this gifted man Apollos. He's a wonderful speaker but a little bit untrained and they actually bring him into their home and begin to disciple him. Now what we find out later on is that Apollos actually goes on to Corinth, the church that Paul had started and that because he is now adequately trained he helps grow and instruct the church there.

Remember now that the church in Rome was meeting in their home. Now look for a moment at 1 Corinthians 16:19.

^{ESV} **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.

Now think about that. When they met Paul they lived together in their house. When they went to Ephesus they took Apollos into their house. When they lived in Ephesus the church met in their house. When Paul sends his greetings to the church in Corinth he includes greetings from the church that met in their house.

Now one more passage and then we'll get back to Romans. Look at 2 Timothy 4:19.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:19**...Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

Now when Paul wrote 2 Timothy which is clearly one of his later books, Aquila and Priscilla were there. And then finally, we have them mentioned here in Romans.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:5**...Greet also the church in their house.

Now as I thought about that this week, it occurred to me what an extraordinary couple they must have been. They started out in Rome and were expelled. They moved to Corinth where they met Paul and became lay missionaries. They moved with Paul to Ephesus and were there able to fully disciple Apollos, who then moved on the Corinth. Then, apparently, they move back to Rome for awhile to help establish the church there (obviously, they were there when Paul wrote this letter) and then back to Ephesus again where they helped Timothy while Paul was being tried in Rome. What a wonderful couple they were, fully committed to lay ministry and disciple-making and what a wonderful pattern they have established for others to follow. Now it may be that you are never called to vocational ministry but that doesn't mean that they didn't play a role, a pivotal role, I helping Christ build his church.

You know, when I am think of Aquila and Priscilla I think of people like Harold and Dot Driver who are committed to the work of the ministry even in their retirement. They know us here just as they know their church in North Carolina and they are committed to the Wycliffe ministry of JARRS there and are perfectly willing to move wherever they can be a help and you know they are willing to do that even though Harold is not exactly healthy. Now that doesn't mean they despise the idea of being in one place...like where their grandchildren are. No, it doesn't mean that at all. But they are willing, perfectly willing, to go where they are needed and they are blessing everywhere they go. When they first came here they didn't sit around on the sidelines. No they got involved right off and threw themselves into whatever needed to be done.

I remember the firs Sunday I ever met Harold. He just walked up and said, **"I'm Harold Driver, I am associated with Wycliffe. I work for JARS, Have you go**

something I can do?" He didn't even say, **"Hi"** just, **"I'm Harold what can I do to help?"** He's still like that.

They were flexible and they were available. They were shadow ministers pushing the kingdom of Christ along in the light.

But there were others. Look at the second half of verse 5.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

Now we don't know much about this man other than that he was the first convert in Asia, in other word he was the first convert in Ephesus.

Now look at verse 6.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:6...**Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

How does Paul know that?

^{ESV} **Romans 16:7...**Greet Andronicus and Junia¹, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

That doesn't mean they were apostles. It means they were well-known to the apostles.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:8...** Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:9...**Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:10...**Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:11...** Greet my kinsman Herodion.

Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:12...** Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa.

Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:13...**Greet Rufus (a wonderful name), chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:14...**Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:15...**Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them..

^{ESV} **Romans 16:16...** Greet one another with a holy kiss.

(Rom 16:8-16 ESV) ⁸

Now let me ask you, **“Why do you think Paul mentions so many names and what does his ability to mention so many names tell you?”**

Well, I think it tells you that Paul kept up with other churches. He knew what was going even in churches he had not visited. I want you to think about that. He knew who the people were evening churches he had not visited and apparently he kept up with those he met wherever he traveled. He knew what the various saints were doing and how well they doing what they were doing. He is not necessarily drawn to the high profile people either. You see, I think this section tells us that we ought to have a much bigger view of the church than just our

own local congregation. We ought to be praying for other churches. We ought to be thinking of other churches and the individuals in other churches.

But you will never be able to do that very well until you get to know the people here in our own church. Now I know some of you are timid and are willing to just come and hide in the shadows but if you ever want to understand the true wonder of the Body of Christ you need to get over that. You need to learn other people's names and pray for others and attend church functions and one of the care groups. You need to risk a little and see whether or not the Body of Christ could use a hand, your hand. I assure you can.

And you know the example of Paul here is a wonderful thing. He was willing to encourage saints he had never met and he was willing to **"keep up"** with the activities of those he did know and he had none of the modern conveniences we have. He had no email, no Internet, no telephone and yet he knew how people were doing and what they were doing and what they needed and how they ought to be prayed for. Paul kept up and we ought to strive to keep up as well. If you're hiding out there I urge you as strongly as I can, **"Come on in and help us. Get to know us...let us get to know you. The Body of Christ is a wonderful thing."**

You know when I was at Dallas Seminary, I had a very controversial teacher whose name was Zane Hodges. I disliked his theology intensely, maybe even hated it. He eventually got fired for his theology but I loved the man and I want to tell you why. I was one of about eight hundred students at DTS. But I was a little different than most of the students; I was a commuter student. In other words I never went to many functions. I drove in and drove out and went to

work. I never really got to know anyone over the twenty-year period it took me to graduate. I was a poor student.

I had Zane Hodges for a class one time and when he called role and I answered he asked me, **“Mr. Browning what is your wife’s name and your kids’ names.”** I told and forgot about it. About two months later I was walking across campus and I saw Prof. Hodges coming toward me. I didn’t expect him to greet me but he did. He said, “Hi Tom. How’s Beverly and how are Gage and Aaris? I pray for them every week.”

I never forgot that. I think his theology was bad but his pastoral affection was terrific. He was willing to commit himself to whatever time and energy it took to remember my name.

Paul does the same thing here. Twelve hundred miles away from where he is he can name thirty people in the Roman church. Of course, some of that may be affected by the fact that some of the people mentioned were relatives. How many times does he say that? Did you notice that in the list? Doesn’t that tell us that Paul had quite an impact on his own family? They believed he was real and his faith was genuine.

Of course, it is Paul’s love for the Body of Christ that causes him to warn the Romans one more time about divisions and strife.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:17**...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.

It's an awful thing that we have to be reminded time and time again about the awful nature of dissension. It is a shame that we have to be reminded that the Body of Christ is only subject to destruction from within. Every one of us, every one of us, ought to make it a point of constant prayer that God maintain the peace of our congregation and we ought to make it just as much a point of prayer that God allow us to be peacemakers in this congregation and to strive not to strive.

And Paul was convinced of that concerning the Romans. Look at verse 19.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:19**...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. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Isn't it wonderful how he ties the advance of the church to the figure of crushing Satan underfoot from Genesis 3? Obviously it is an allusion to the curse on the serpent and the promise to the woman. Paul is saying that if the Romans avoid divisiveness that they will have wonderful victory.

And then in Romans 16:21 he attaches the greetings of some of his fellow workers in Corinth.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:21**... Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:22**...I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

Tertius was apparently Paul's secretary of copyist.

^{ESV} **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.

The finally, Paul closes his great letter to the Romans with a benediction and I really don't see how I could do much better than to just read it and let it end both his letter and our study.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:25...**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.

That's the book of Romans, the book that changed the world. May it change us as well. Let's pray.

¹ Daniel Wallace, "Junia Among the Apostles The Double Identification Problem in Romans 16:7. Junia Among the Apostles: The Double Identification Problem in Romans 16:7." From the NetBible Webpage. Wallace writes, "In sum, until further evidence is produced that counters the working hypothesis, we must conclude that Andronicus and Junia were not apostles, but were known to the apostles." Wallace also concludes that the name Junia, though it can be either feminine or masculine is probably feminine.