



Title: Living Faithful and Free

Text: Romans 16:1-23

Date: July 23, 2023

Main Idea: Paul's greeting to the Roman Church reveals a diverse collection of faithful brothers and sisters whose obedience should encourage and inspire us today.

Lecture Tip: If your style is largely lecture style, you can use the headings and questions to make your main points for the text. Then as you teach, you could follow-up with application and apply questions sprinkled into the explanation of the text in your teaching.

Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will

need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Discussion-Based Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Lecture Tip: If your style is largely lecture style, you can use the headings and questions to make your main points for the text. Then as you teach, you could follow-up with application and apply questions sprinkled into the explanation of the text in your teaching. The answers are provided below.

There is also additional space after each section if you print the lessons and take notes.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question: If you wrote a letter to a friend about all the ways other Christians supported you and encouraged you, who would be on your list and why?

READ ROMANS 16:1-23

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What details, themes, or comments stand out in these verses? Why do you think Paul focused on specific individuals in v. 1-16? Does this reframe your perception of some of the concerns Paul has shared about divisiveness and conflict?
2. What does this chapter tell us about the early church? Does anything surprise you or change your understanding of the reality of the audience Paul speaks to? Are there any cultural details that seem unusual or make you want to dig in further?

3. What do we learn about the church at Rome collectively? How does this influence the vision of the church that Paul has been unpacking? Does this influence how you think about some of Paul's other teachings in the letter? Did you expect his ties to the audience to be this personal?

4. Paul shifts one final time to instruction in v. 17-20. What significance is there to the fact these are his final words in the letter? What stands out to you? Do you find anything surprising or new?

Explain – What does this mean?

In Chapter 16, Paul begins to draw the letter to its conclusion beginning with a string of personal greetings and recognitions for specific individuals in the Church of Rome. In doing so, Paul reveals insights about the people that make up this church and its place in the larger world. Recall, Paul has not yet been to Rome at this point. Despite this fact, he is able to speak directly to and about a seemingly large number of members of this community. For your lesson, you may want to look specifically at some of these individuals to

highlight the specific language and thoughts that Paul shares about them or you can consider the list as a whole to reflect on this picture of the early church.

1. What are some themes/truths we can draw from the list and how Paul describes these individuals? Focus on certain individual descriptions to see what Paul had to share in these details.

2. How does Paul describe Phoebe? What can we learn about her and from his description of her? Why do you think he started out this list with her?
The most expansive description relates to Phoebe. This is likely in part due to the fact she seems to have likely been the courier of the letter (and possibly the reader). Noteworthy comments include (refer to the Commentary for greater detail on each of these):
 - a. “Sister” – This certainly indicates she is a fellow believer, but also speaks to a relationship and significance to Paul.
 - b. “Servant of the Church at Cenchreae” – The word “servant” has also been translated to mean “deaconess” and may have indicated a formal role within her local church in Cenchreae (a major port for the City of Corinth where Paul is likely writing from). It may also have referred more generally to the fact that she was noteworthy for her service in the church. If the role was officially as a “deaconess,” the paucity of details provided by Paul reminds us not to attempt to make more of it than necessary.
 - c. “A Patron of Many” – Paul makes clear that Phoebe has some means, potentially significant, that she has made available to the church, including Paul personally. This expands on the notion of her as a faithful servant within the church and adds helpful context to the type of person the Roman church will be meeting and supporting (as Paul asked to help her in whatever way the church can).

3. Paul also goes into some detail about Priscilla and Aquilla, a couple he has shared a long history with and who were among the Jews expelled from Rome previously. What stands out in his description of them? what can we learn from their story? Consider specific details he includes.
 - a. “Fellow Workers” – Paul is close to this couple having lived with and worked with them as tentmakers in Corinth (See Acts 18:1-3) and subsequently Ephesus where they hosted a church in their home (Acts 18:18-19). He greets them/references them in other letters including 1 Cor. 16:19 and 2 Tim. 4:19.

- b. “Who Risked Their Necks for My Life” – It is not clear when this happened, but clearly Paul was aware of the great personal risk they had taken on his behalf.
 - c. “Church in their House” – This couple made it a practice to start/foster a community of believers in their home. This is remarkable considering we know they lived in Rome (pre- and post- the expulsion of the Jews), Ephesus, and Corinth.
 - d. Note: Commentators have pointed out that Paul repeatedly places Priscilla first when mentioning the couple. This is somewhat unusual and may indicate either she was of a more prominent family/class than Aquilla, she had been the first to convert to the faith, or perhaps she was the dominant personality in the relationship.
4. What characteristics of early church stand out through these descriptions?
- a. This list provides clues to a wide range of diverse backgrounds and experiences. This was not Paul’s ultimate point, but it is an important perspective. What clues in the text speak to the distinctions/diversity within this church? What are some of those areas in which church members may come from different backgrounds, experiences, etc.
 - i. Race: The dynamic of Jews and Gentiles is prominent throughout Romans. In this list, Paul repeatedly mentions individuals who are “kinsmen,” i.e. Jews. Likewise, a number of these are Greek names that seem to indicate Gentile believers with whom he has a connection or who he knows by reputation.
 - ii. Gender: Among the list of 26 specific individuals, Paul mentions 9 women. In addition, he mentions these women are noteworthy for their hard work and service to the church.
 - iii. Class/Socioeconomic Divisions: Scholars have pointed out that many of these individuals have names common for slaves or freedmen (includes Hermes, Philologus, Urbanus, Julia, and Ampliatus). By contrast, the references to the “family” or “household” of Aristobulus and Narcissus seem to indicate a group of believers who are part of prominent households that had close connections to the emperor.
 - b. What clues does this passage provide about how this church worships and fellowships? What does Paul say about house churches? How does this inform your understanding of Paul’s letter and his understanding of this church body?:

Numerous times in this passage, Paul refers to the church that is located in someone’s home (e.g. Priscilla and Aquilla). This is a reminder the Church in Rome is really a collection diverse both in their makeup but in their routine for gathering and worship. This reinforces Paul’s desire for harmony and unity. It also makes it more remarkable in some

ways that the church has sustained and can be known for “obedience” (v. 19) since it is a collection of smaller house churches. The presence of faithful leaders like Priscilla and Aquilla may help explain this as well.

- c. Does it surprise you that Paul can speak about and urge a greeting for so many specific individuals in a church he has not been part of? What does this tell you about the reputation of the Roman Church and how churches related to one another in the early church?

There is a remarkable degree of interconnection between the churches spread across the ancient Mediterranean. Priscilla and Aquilla’s roots in multiple churches reflect this, but we see the same in some of the relationships Paul refers to. This likely also reinforces his confidence in stating “All the churches of Christ greet you” in v. 16. In v. 7, Andronicus and Junia are said to be “known to the apostles.” While this translation has prompted some debate among commentators, it seems they are most likely missionaries who have become well known throughout the church (some have debated if the original Greek indicates they themselves are apostles on par with Paul, Peter, et. al, but that seems unusual given the fact they are not mentioned elsewhere).

5. How do these greetings model or even help promote strengthening of relationships within the church? Consider the focus Paul has placed on harmony, peace, and unity throughout the letter.

Paul is asking those in the church who receive this letter to share the greeting with those he mentions which can function both as an endorsement/encouragement of these individuals and a practice that will reinforce the need for community and prompt an acknowledgement/celebration of what they have in common as believers.

6. Look again at v. 17-20. What specific behaviors/types of people is Paul telling the Roman believers to avoid and why? Does this contradict his earlier calls to unity and harmony within the church?

Paul warns them against those who would cause division and, specifically, bad teachers. He calls out those who would teach contrary to what he has taught by accusing them of “smooth talk” and “flattery.” This is consistent with his other teaching in that he wants them to cling to the good and right in the interest of persevering as a faithful, obedient church.

7. What does Paul mean in v.19 when he says he wants them to “be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil”? Does this remind you of Jesus’s words in Matt. 10:16? Why does Paul include this in his final charge/instruction to this church?

Paul recognizes the importance of continuing to encourage the church to pursue and focus on doing good. Kruse in his commentary provides an

extensive list of references from a wide range of Paul's letters sharing this exact call. Being innocent/blameless should be a hallmark for believers.

8. Why does Paul choose to conclude this teaching and instruction with v. 20? What does the image of Satan crushed under foot evoke? What is the significance of him saying Satan would be crushed "under your feet"?
This seems to evoke the promise of Gen. 3:15 about Jesus's ultimate triumph over Satan by crushing his head. In light of all that has gone on before in this passage, it does seem appropriate to remind this church again of the certainty of Christ's victory and the coming end to the one who causes the division/dissension/pain they must fight to avoid.

Apply – How does this change me?

Answers will vary here based on context and personal answers in class.

- Does this passage challenge you in how you view and consider others in our church body? Could you list this many people and share the same gratitude and appreciation for how God is using them in my life and in the life of our congregation?
- Paul knew the Roman church by reputation (and relationship with some of these individuals). What is the reputation of Immanuel? What is your part or your class's part in building or sustaining a positive reputation? What does it look like for you or your class to be known for working hard on behalf of the church?
- What does it look like to live our lives in a manner that is “wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil”? How can our church, your class, or your friends help spur you on in this? Why does it help to have others around us as we pursue this goal?

Respond – What’s my next step?

Answers will vary here.

- Who is someone in our church who has made a positive impact on your life or whose friendship has made a difference in your life? Consider taking time to thank them or encourage them for their faithfulness and obedience.
- How can we strengthen our appreciation for the diversity in gifts/talents, backgrounds, experiences, and calling within our church? How does this help us accomplish our task as a church serving our city? Ask the Lord for help in growing your appreciation for others in our church.
- What is something you can do this week to help make you more “wise to what is good or help you be innocent toward what is evil”? Who can play a role in helping you pursue this?

Teacher Tip in preparing your lesson. Try to summarize what Paul is saying in a few sentences before you read the commentary. That will help anchor your lesson, whether you’re discussion style or lecture style. Then use the commentary to reinforce what you have personally learned from the text. The John Stott commentary below is a supplement to the F.F. Bruce commentary you were given in August 2022.

Commentary: Taken from John Stott's commentary on Romans 16:1-23

Note to Group Leaders: You also have your F.F. Bruce Commentary on Romans you were given on Team Night. You can use that one, in addition to this one, to help you grasp the text. Reach out to Courtney Reissig if you need one or haven't received yours.

27. His commendation and greetings

16:1-16

'I think', wrote Chrysostom, 'that many even of those who have the appearance of being extremely good men, hasten over this part of the epistle as superfluous ... Yet', he went on, 'the gold founders' people are careful even about the little fragments ... it is possible even from bare names to find a great treasure.' Brunner went further and called Romans 16 'one of the most instructive chapters of the New Testament', because it encourages personal relationships of love in the church. Chrysostom and Brunner are right.¹ Even in the genealogies of both the Old and the New Testaments, and in Paul's list of those who send or receive greetings, there are truths to ponder and lessons to learn.

1. A commendation (1-2)

It seems very likely that Phoebe was entrusted with the responsible task of carrying Paul's letter to its destination in Rome, although other business was apparently taking her to the city as well, perhaps commerce or 'quite probably a law suit'.² So she needed a 'letter of commendation' to take with her, which

¹ Chrysostom, p. 553; Brunner, p. 126. See 'The Roman Christians of Romans 16' by Peter Lampe, in Donfried, pp. 216ff.

² Dunn, vol. 38B, pp. 888f. This opinion is based on the fact that *pragma* (2) is used of a lawsuit in 1 Cor. 6:1.

would introduce her to the Christians in Rome. Such letters were common in the ancient world, and necessary to protect people from charlatans. They are several times mentioned in the New Testament.³ In his testimonial for Phoebe Paul asks the Roman church both *to receive her*, giving her a worthy Christian welcome and hospitality, and *to give her any help she may need*, as a stranger in the capital city, presumably in connection with her other business.

Before and after these requests Paul supplies some information about Phoebe, 'so placing on each side of the needs of this blessed woman', writes Chrysostom, 'her praises'.⁴ Indeed, he goes on, 'see how many ways he takes to give her dignity'. First, he calls her *our sister*, 'and it is no slight thing to be called the sister of Paul'.⁵ Secondly, he acknowledges her as *a servant* ('minister', REB) *of the church in Cenchrea* (1), which was Corinth's eastern port at the head of the Saronic Gulf. This general meaning of *diakonos* may be correct here. On the other hand, we know that the office of 'deacon' already existed, in however undeveloped a form.⁶ So RSV and NIV margin call Phoebe a 'deaconess', and Professor Cranfield regards this not only as 'very much more natural' but as 'virtually certain'.⁷ Thirdly, *she has been a great help to many people*, including Paul (2). This phrase renders *prostatis*, which can mean 'patroness' or 'benefactress'. Phoebe was evidently a woman of means, who had used her wealth to support the church and the apostle.

2. Many greetings (3–16)

Thus Paul sends greetings to twenty-six individuals, twenty-four of whom he names, adding in most cases an appreciative personal reference. Scholars have naturally wondered how the apostle could know so many people so well in a church he had never visited. Some have therefore developed the theory that these greetings were in reality sent to Ephesus, not Rome. For Paul had stayed three years in Ephesus and knew it well. Further, his first greeting was sent to Priscilla and Aquila (3), who had accompanied him to Ephesus, and his second to Epenetus, whom he describes as *the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia* (5), Ephesus being the provincial capital. On the other hand, there is no manuscript evidence that these greetings were ever detached from their place in Romans; the names fit Rome better than Ephesus; and if Paul had sent this list of greetings to Ephesus, it would have been too short rather than too long.

³ *E.g.* Acts 18:27; 2 Cor. 3:1.

⁴ Chrysostom, p. 550.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

REB The Revised English Bible (1989).

⁶ *E.g.* Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 11.

RSV The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NT, 1946; second edition, 1971; OT, 1952).

NIV The New International Version of the Bible (1973, 1978, 1984).

⁷ Cranfield, vol. II, p. 781.

As for the question how Paul could have known so many Roman Christians, travel was more frequent in those days than many realize. Aquila and Priscilla are a case in point. New Testament references to them tell us that Aquila came from Pontus on the southern shore of the Black Sea, that he and Priscilla lived in Italy until the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49, that they then moved to Corinth where Paul met them and stayed with them, and that they travelled with him to Ephesus, which is perhaps where *they risked their lives* for him (4). It is not in the least unlikely that after Claudius' death in AD 54 they returned to Rome, which is where they received Paul's greeting.⁸ Perhaps a number of other Jewish and Jewish-Christian refugees from Rome met Paul during their exile and returned to Rome after Claudius' edict had been rescinded.

Reflecting on the names and circumstances of the people Paul greets, one is particularly impressed by the unity and diversity of the church to which they belonged.

a. The diversity of the church

The Roman Christians were diverse in race, rank and gender. As for race, we know already that the church in Rome had both Jewish and Gentile members, and this is confirmed by the list. Certainly Aquila and Priscilla were Jewish Christians, and so were Paul's *syngeneis* (7 and 11), which is less likely to mean his *relatives* than his 'kinsfolk' or 'those of his own race' (as in 9:3). But it is equally clear that others on his list were Gentiles.

The social status of his Roman friends is uncertain. On the one hand, inscriptions indicate that Ampliatus (8), Urbanus (9), Hermes (14), Philologus and Julia (15) were common names for slaves. On the other, some at least were freed people, and others had links with persons of distinction. For example, commentators consider it quite likely that the Aristobulus mentioned (10) was the grandson of Herod the Great and friend of the Emperor Claudius, and that Narcissus (11) was none other than the well-known, rich and powerful freedman who exercised great influence on Claudius. It is not of course that these celebrities had themselves become Christians, and in any case they were probably dead by now, but their households had clearly remained in being, and there were Christians in them. J. B. Lightfoot concludes his interesting note on 'Caesar's Household'⁹ with these words: '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.'¹⁰

More distinguished, though in a different and nobler way, was Rufus (13), for he may well have been the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross to

⁸ Acts 18:1ff., 18, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19.

⁹ Phil. 4:22.

¹⁰ J. B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Macmillan, 1868; 8th edn., 1885), p. 177.

Golgotha. At least Mark, whose gospel was written in or for Rome, is the only evangelist who mentions that Simon's sons were Alexander and Rufus, and he does it in such a way as to imply that they were already well known to his readers in Rome.¹¹

But the most interesting and instructive aspect of church diversity in Rome is that of gender. Nine out of the twenty-six persons greeted are women: Priscilla (3), Mary (6), probably Junia (7), Tryphena and Tryphosa, who may have been twin sisters, and Persis (12), Rufus' mother (13), Julia and Nereus' sister (15). Paul evidently thinks highly of them all. He singles out four (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis) as having 'worked hard'. The verb *kopiaō* implies strong exertion, is used of all four of them, and is not applied to anybody else on the list. Paul does not specify what kind of hard work they did.

Two names call for special attention. The first is Priscilla, who in verse 3 and in three other New Testament verses is named in front of her husband.¹² Whether the reason was spiritual (that she was converted before him or was more active in Christian service than he) or social (that she was a woman of standing in the community) or temperamental (that she was the dominant personality), Paul appears to recognize and not to criticize her leadership.

The other woman to be considered is mentioned in verse 7: *Greet Andronicus and Junias*. In the Greek sentence the second name is *Iouian*, which could be the accusative of either Junias (masculine) or Junia (feminine). Commentators are agreed that the latter is much more likely to be correct, since the former name is unknown elsewhere. Perhaps then Andronicus and Junia were a married couple, about whom Paul tells us four things: they are his kinsfolk, that is, Jewish people; they have at some point been his fellow prisoners; they were converted before he was; and they *are out-standing among the apostles*. In which of its two senses is Paul using the word 'apostles'? The commonest New Testament application of the word is to 'the apostles of Christ', meaning the Twelve (Matthias having replaced Judas), together with Paul and James, a very small group whom Christ had personally appointed and equipped to be the teachers of the church.

The much less frequent use of the term designates 'the apostles of the churches'.¹³ This must have been a considerably larger group, who were sent out by churches as what we would call 'missionaries', like Epaphroditus who was an 'apostle' of the Philippian church,¹⁴ or like Barnabas and Saul who had been sent out by the church of Antioch.¹⁵ If then by 'apostles' in Romans 16:7 Paul is referring to the apostles of Christ, we must translate that they were 'outstanding in the eyes of the apostles' or 'highly esteemed by the apostles',

¹¹ Mk. 15:21.

¹² Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tim. 4:19.

¹³ 2 Cor. 8:23.

¹⁴ Phil. 2:25, literally 'your apostle'.

¹⁵ Acts 13:1ff.; 14:4, 14; cf. 1 Thes. 2:7.

for it is impossible to suppose that an otherwise unknown couple have taken their place alongside the apostles Peter, Paul, John and James. Since this translation slightly strains the Greek, however, it is probably better to understand 'apostles' as meaning 'apostles of the churches', and to conclude that Andronicus and Junia were indeed outstanding missionaries.

The prominent place occupied by women in Paul's entourage shows that he was not at all the male chauvinist of popular fantasy. Does it also throw light on the vexed question of the ministry of women? As we have seen, among the women Paul greets four were hard workers in the Lord's service. Priscilla was one of Paul's 'fellow-workers', Junia was a well-known missionary, and Phoebe may have been a deaconess. On the other hand, it has to be said that none of them is called a presbyter in the church, even though an argument from silence can never be decisive.

b. The unity of the church

Alongside the Roman church's diversity in race, rank and sex, it experienced a profound unity which transcended its differences. For 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.¹⁶ Moreover, the list of greetings contains several indications of this fundamental unity of the people of God. Four times Paul describes his friends as being *in Christ* (3, 7, 9, 10) and five times as *in the Lord* (8, 11, twice in 12, 13). Twice he uses the family language of 'sister' and 'brother' (1, 14). In addition, he is not inhibited from calling people 'beloved' or 'my beloved' (5, 8, 9, 12). He also mentions two experiences which strengthen Christian unity, namely being fellow workers (3, 9) and fellow sufferers (4, 7).

How then in practice was the Roman church's unity in diversity displayed? We know that they met in houses or household churches, for Paul probably refers to such six times (5, 10, 11, 14, 15; cf. 23).¹⁷ How was membership of these determined? We cannot suppose that they met according to sex or rank, so that there were different house churches for men and women, for slaves and free. What about race, however? It would be understandable if Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, and specially the weak and the strong, wanted to meet with their own people, because culture and customs are a strong cement to fellowship. But did they? I think not. The toleration of ethnic division in the Roman house churches would be entirely incompatible with Paul's sustained argument in chapters 14–15, and with its climax. How could the church members 'accept one another', and how 'with one heart and mouth ... glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (15:6f.) if they worshipped in different, ethnically segregated house churches? Such an arrangement would contradict the church's unity in diversity.

¹⁶ Gal. 3:28.

¹⁷ Cf. Acts 12:12; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phm. 2.

The same is true today. It is of course a fact that people like to worship with their own kith and kin, and with their own kind, as experts in church growth remind us; and it may be necessary to acquiesce in different congregations according to language, which is the most formidable barrier of all. But heterogeneity is of the essence of the church, since it is the one and only community in the world in which Christ has broken down all dividing walls. The vision we have been given of the church triumphant is of a company drawn from 'every nation, tribe, people and language', who are all singing God's praises in unison.¹⁸ So we must declare that a homogeneous church is a defective church, which must work penitently and perseveringly towards heterogeneity.¹⁹

Paul concludes his list of individual greetings with two universals. The first is that, although only a few of them have been greeted by name, they must all *greet one another with a holy kiss* (16a). The apostles Paul and Peter both insisted on this,²⁰ and the Church Fathers took it up. Justin Martyr wrote that 'on finishing the prayers we greet each other with a kiss',²¹ and Tertullian seems to have been the first to call it a 'kiss of peace'.²² 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. For those of us who live in the West, J. B. Phillips paraphrases: 'Give one another a hearty handshake all round for my sake.'

Paul's second universal follows: *all the churches of Christ send greetings* (16b). But how can he speak for all the churches? Is this mere rhetoric? No, he is probably writing representatively. 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.²³ Perhaps he has asked them if he may send their churches' greetings to Rome.

28. His warnings, messages and doxology

16:17–27

¹⁸ Rev. 7:9ff.

¹⁹ See *The Pasadena Consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle* (Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 1, 1978).

²⁰ 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14.

²¹ Justin Martyr, *Apology* I. 65.

²² Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 14.

²³ Acts 20:4.

Some find Paul's transition from greeting to warnings very abrupt, and the tone of his admonition so harsh as to be inconsistent with the rest of his letter, and especially with his gentle handling of the weak. They therefore wonder if verses 17–20 were written by another hand than Paul's. But it is readily understandable that his mind should move from the Roman church's unity in diversity (to be expressed in the kiss of peace) to the menace of those who were threatening divisions. Moreover, Paul's conciliatory attitude to the weak reflected his respect for sensitive consciences; his severity to the false teachers was aroused by their deliberate mischief in disrupting the fellowship and contradicting apostolic teaching. Having said this, we still do not know who they were. Paul's language is too indefinite to permit certainty. All we can say is that, since they served themselves instead of Christ (18), they had antinomian tendencies.

1. Paul's warnings (17–20)

Paul begins his exhortation with the same words which he has used to introduce an earlier one: *I urge you, brothers* (17, cf. 12:1). He issues a threefold appeal—to vigilance, to separation and to discernment.

First, Paul pleads for vigilance: *watch out for* (JB 'be on your guard against') *those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way, hindering your progress, that are* (both of them) *contrary to the teaching you have learned* (17). Of course some *divisions* are inevitable, like those caused by loyalty to Christ,¹ and so are some *obstacles* (*skandala*), especially the stumbling-block of the cross (9:32f.).² Paul urges the Romans to look out for those who cause them because they contradict the teaching of the apostles. He takes it for granted, even thus early in the church's history, that there is a doctrinal and ethical norm which the Romans must follow, not contradict; it is preserved for us in the New Testament.

Secondly, Paul calls for separation from those who deliberately depart from the apostolic faith. *Keep away from them*, he writes. There is no question of approaching them with a holy kiss, but rather of standing aloof, and even turning away.³ Why is this? What is the essence of their deviation? Paul tells us. *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites* (18a), literally 'their own belly' (AV). This is very unlikely to be an allusion to the controversy over the Jewish food laws. It is rather a graphic metaphor of self-

JB The Jerusalem Bible (1966).

¹ See Mt. 10:34ff.

² 1 Cor. 1:23.

³ For similar commands see 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thes. 3:6, 14; 2 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 3:10. They relate not to trivial matters, but to inveterate and impenitent offenders, who deliberately turn away from plain apostolic truth, and who ignore repeated warnings.

AV The Authorized (King James') Version of the Bible (1611).

indulgence (as in Phil. 3:19, 'their god is their stomach'). The expression is used 'in the sense of serving oneself, of being the willing slave of one's egotism'.⁴ These false teachers have no love for Christ, and no wish to be his willing slaves. Instead, they are 'utterly self-centred' (JBP), and also have a baneful effect on the gullible. *By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people* (18b). Better, 'they seduce the minds of simple people with smooth and specious words' (REB).

Thirdly, Paul urges the Romans to grow in discernment. On the whole he is very pleased with them. *Everyone has heard about your obedience, he says, so I am full of joy over you* (19a). Nevertheless, there are two kinds of obedience, blind and discerning, and he longs for them to develop the latter: *but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil* (19b). To be wise in regard to good is to recognize it, love it and follow it. With regard to evil, however, he wants them to be unsophisticated, even guileless, so completely should they shy away from any experience of it. J. B. Phillips captures the contrast well: 'I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil.'

Here then are three valuable tests to apply to different systems of doctrine and ethics—biblical, Christological and moral tests. We could put them in the form of questions about any kind of teaching we come across. Does it agree with Scripture? Does it glorify the Lord Christ? Does it promote goodness?

In verse 20 Paul adds an assurance to his warning. He has written about good and evil; he wants the Roman Christians to know that there is no doubt about the ultimate outcome, the triumph of good over evil. He detects the strategy of Satan behind the activity of the false teachers, and he is confident that the devil is going to be overthrown. *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet* (20a). That is, God 'will throw him under your feet, that you may trample upon him'.⁵ He has already been decisively defeated; but he has not yet conceded his defeat.

It may seem strange that in the context Paul refers to 'the God of peace' (as in 15:33), since enjoying peace and crushing Satan do not sound altogether compatible with each other. But God's peace allows no appeasement of the devil. It is only through the destruction of evil that true peace can be attained.

Probably there is an allusion to Genesis 3:15, where God promised that the seed of the woman (namely the Christ) would crush the serpent's head. But there is surely a further reference to man, male and female, whom God created and to whom he gave dominion. As the psalmist put it, God has 'put everything under his feet'.⁶ So far this has been fulfilled only in Christ, since God has put

⁴ Cranfield, vol. II, p. 800.

JBP *The New Testament in Modern English*, by J. B. Phillips (Collins, 1958).

REB *The Revised English Bible* (1989).

⁵ Sanday and Headlam, p. 431.

⁶ Ps. 8:6.

'all things under his feet'.⁷ Yet still his exaltation is incomplete, for, while he reigns, he also waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.⁸ That this will happen 'soon' is not necessarily a time reference, but rather a statement that God has planned nothing to occupy the space between the ascension and the parousia. The parousia is the very next event on his calendar. Meanwhile, the Romans should expect regular interim victories over Satan, partial crushings of him under their feet.

Such victories would be impossible, however, apart from grace. So Paul adds: *The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you* (20b).

2. Paul's messages (21–24)

Having sent his own personal greetings to twenty-six individuals in Rome (3–16), Paul now passes on messages from eight named people, who are with him in Corinth. He begins with one extremely well-known name, followed by three apparently unknown ones. *Timothy, my fellow-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives* (21). If anybody deserved to be called Paul's 'fellow-worker', that person was Timothy. For the last eight years Timothy had been Paul's constant travelling companion and had undertaken several special missions at Paul's request. The apostle evidently had a warm affection for his young assistant. Having led him to Christ, he regarded him as his son in the faith.⁹ He was now in Corinth, about to set sail for Jerusalem with the offering from the Greek churches.¹⁰

From his fellow worker Paul turns to three of his fellow countrymen, as his 'relatives' should probably be understood. We cannot for certain identify any of them, although many guesses have been made, some more plausible than others. For example, although there is nothing to link *Lucius* with the 'Lucius of Cyrene' who was in Antioch with Paul ten years previously,¹¹ it is tempting to identify him as Luke the evangelist, since we know from one of his tell-tale 'we' passages that he was in Corinth at the time.¹² The only difficulty is that Luke was a Gentile. But then 'my fellow-countrymen' could refer only to Jason and Sosipater. This Jason could quite easily be the Jason who had been Paul's landlord in Thessalonica,¹³ and Sosipater could be the Berean church's delegate to Jerusalem, whose name was abbreviated to Sopater,¹⁴ for he too was in Corinth at the time.

⁷ Eph. 1:22; cf. Heb. 2:8f.

⁸ Ps. 110:1, and its many New Testament applications to Christ.

⁹ E.g. 1 Cor. 4:17.

¹⁰ Acts 20:4.

¹¹ Acts 13:1.

¹² Acts 20:5f.

¹³ Acts 17:5ff.

¹⁴ Acts 20:4.

At this point Paul allows his scribe, to whom he has been dictating this letter, to write his own greeting. *I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord* (22).

Next comes a message from Paul's host in Corinth. *Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings* (23a). Several men called Gaius appear in the New Testament, for it was a common name. It would be natural, however, to identify this one with the Corinthian whom Paul had baptized.¹⁵ Some scholars have further suggested that his full Roman name was Gaius Titius Justus, in which case he had a large house next to the synagogue, into which he had welcomed Paul after the Jews had rejected his gospel.¹⁶ It is then understandable that Paul would again be his house guest, and that the church would also meet in his home.

Two further people complete the series of messages from Corinth. *Erastus, who is the city's director of public works* (RSV 'the city treasurer'), *and our brother Quartus send you their greetings* (23b). Of Quartus nothing is known, although F. F. Bruce asks if it would be 'excessively far-fetched' to think of him as Tertius' younger brother, since *tertius* means 'third' and *quartus* 'fourth'.¹⁷ In response, C. E. B. Cranfield dubs Bruce's guess 'an exercise of free fancy'. Erastus, on the other hand, however we should translate 'the *oikonomos* of the city', seems to have been a responsible local government official. Perhaps he was the *aedile*, the magistrate in charge of public works, whose name is still clearly legible in a first-century Latin inscription on a marble pavement close to the ruins of old Corinth. It is difficult to see, however, how he could at the same time have been one of Paul's itinerant helpers who on one occasion was sent 'to Macedonia',¹⁸ although on another he 'stayed in Corinth'.¹⁹

¹⁵ 1 Cor. 1:14.

¹⁶ Acts 18:7.

RSV The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NT, 1946; second edition, 1971; OT, 1952).

¹⁷ Bruce, p. 266.

¹⁸ Acts 19:22.

¹⁹ 2 Tim. 4:20.

¹ John R. W. Stott, [*The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 392–402.

Additional Resources:

Podcast: Knowing Faith Podcast: #149 Romans 16:

<https://www.trainingthechurch.com/episodes/episode-149-romans-16>

Course Notes: The Gospel Coalition, Dr. Michael Kruger Study of Romans:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/study-romans-kruger/#romans-16>