

Romans 16:1–16 (ESV)

December 14, 2025

16 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.

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 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. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

I. Introduction

Paul closes with personal greetings that reveal the church's human texture: patrons, household churches, female workers, prisoners, and older converts. These greetings provide a window into early Christian networks and the vital roles of men and women in ministry.

II. Exposition and Reflection

1. The Ministry of Individuals and Households (vv. 1–5, 10–11, 13–15)

- Paul's commendation of Phoebe and mention of Prisca & Aquila, household churches, and numerous named believers highlight ministry as personal, relational, and multicultural.
- Households were central hubs for worship, teaching, and discipleship; support from patrons enabled mobility and effective ministry.

- Application: Value and equip informal ministry networks (homes, small groups, and faithful individuals) as essential for church life.
 - Reflect: How can you empower household and small-group ministry?
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2. Women in Ministry (vv. 1–2, 3–4, 6–7, 12)

- Phoebe is commended as a servant and patron; Prisca (Priscilla) is recognized alongside Aquila as a co-worker in the gospel. Other women (Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Mary) are noted for “working hard” in the Lord. These examples show that women were active, essential participants in the early church’s mission.
 - Scripture affirms significant female involvement in ministry, particularly in service, discipling, hospitality, and support of the mission of the church, while maintaining the complementarian distinction of leadership roles (e.g., elders/pastors/overseers).
 - Application: Encourage women to use their gifts to disciple one another, show hospitality, and care for church, equipping them to serve the body of Christ fully within the roles Scripture prescribes.
 - Reflect: How can we cultivate and recognize the faithful service of women in our congregation in ways that honor God’s design for male and female roles while maximizing the flourishing of the whole church?
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3. The Theology of Christian Relationships (vv. 6–9, 16)

- Paul’s familial greetings show the church as a network of mutual affection and service. The command to “greet one another with a holy kiss” emphasizes Christ-centered intimacy and care.
 - The repeated phrase “my beloved” highlights deep pastoral concern and cross-cultural bonds in a diverse congregation.
 - Application: Cultivate warmth, mutual recognition, and tangible acts of care (greetings, thank-you notes, or public recognition) to strengthen congregational unity.
 - Reflect: What small practices can we adopt to deepen mutual affection and appreciation within our church, honoring the diverse members of our community?
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John Piper, *Commending and Welcoming Radical Risk-Takers for Christ*

Romans 16 is far more than a list of names. It is dense with theology and ecclesiology and ethics. But it's all implicit rather than explicit. It's contained in words rather than propositions. Consider these examples: Lord, Christ, Jesus, church, sisters, brothers, saints, apostles, Gentiles, elect, holy, loved, firstfruit, servant, approved in Christ—all of them full of God-centered meaning. But Paul now assumes it rather than explaining it. Now is not the time for explaining. The time has come for greeting. And O how much we can learn from these greetings!

Let's get the big picture first and then look at three of these people that Paul mentions. Six general observations from the big picture of greetings in verses 1-16.

1. Notice *the names*. There are twenty-seven names. More people are greeted, but twenty-seven are named—twenty-six of them in Rome, and Phoebe (the first mentioned) on her way to Rome. Surely we should learn from this that names matter. I wish I could call you all by name. Jesus does. John 10:3 says, “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” Strive to know each other's names. Paul is working here at building a relationship with the church he wants as his sending church in the mission to Spain. It's amazing how many names he knows in Rome when he has never been there. Let's be like him in this.

2. Notice *the different the relationships and partnerships*. It is remarkable the words that he uses to describe who these people are in relationship to him and to each other: sister, brother, servant, saints, patron, fellow workers, church, firstfruits, kinsmen, fellow prisoners, beloved, approved in Christ, elect, mother to me. The more you connect with people the more different and the more enriching are the ways that they bring blessing into your life—and you to theirs.

3. Notice *how Christ-saturated these relationships are*. Verse 2: “Welcome her *in the Lord*.” Verse 3: “My fellow workers *in Christ Jesus*.” Verse 5: The “first convert *to Christ*.” Verse 7: “They were *in Christ* before me.” Verse 8: “My beloved *in the Lord*.” Verse 9: “My fellow worker *in Christ*.” Verse 10: “Apelles, who is approved *in Christ*.” Verse 11: “Greet those *in the Lord*.” Verse 12: “Greet those workers *in the Lord*.” Verse 13: “Persis, who has worked hard *in the Lord*.” Verse 14: “Rufus, chosen *in the Lord*.”

This is not a simple list of greetings. This is the way a person who is drenched in Christ talks about his friends. When you write your family or friends, or when you talk on the phone, or send an email, is Christ there like this? If you say, as I have heard some say, “I don't wear my faith on my sleeve,” be careful. The issue isn't what's on your sleeve. The issue is what's in your mouth, because Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). If Christ isn't

there in your talk and in your emails, it's not a sleeve issue—it's not merely a personality issue, it's not merely an ethnic issue, it's not merely a family-of-origin issue—it's a heart issue. Let's be a church drenched with Jesus like Paul in Romans 16.

4. Notice that *these folks are spread over several churches* in Rome. Verse 5, referring to Prisca and Aquila: "Greet also the church in their house." So there is one church that he gives a generic greeting to through Prisca and Aquila. Then there are all these other names. Look at verse 14: "Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and *the brothers who are with them.*" That probably means: the church that meets with these brothers. Similarly in verse 15: "Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all *the saints who are with them.*" And there are probably other groupings. So we learn that the *church* in Rome was really *churches* in Rome. So the church in the Twin Cities should be the churches in the Twin Cities. May the Lord multiply Bible-believing, Christ-drenched churches in these cities!

5. Notice *the most common command—to greet.* Thirteen times in sixteen verses he tells them: Greet so and so. And greet so and so. Who is he talking to? I assume that this letter is written to all the Roman Christians. Romans 1:7, "To *all* those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." If I am talking to Kenny Stokes, I don't say, "Greet Kenny Stokes." So it seems that Paul expects this letter to be handled and read and taught by the leaders of the church in Rome. He is telling them: Greet these twenty-six people that I have named and all the churches they represent.

6. Notice *the love that permeates this chapter.* Four times Paul uses the word *loved* or *beloved*. "My beloved Epaenetus" (v. 5), "Ampliatius, my beloved in the Lord" (v. 8), "my beloved Stachys" (v. 9), "Greet the beloved Persis" (v. 12). And then we read things like: "Greet Mary, who has *worked hard* for you" (v. 6) and Prisca and Aquila "risked their necks for my life" (v. 4). This is the language of love. May the Lord take last week's message on wrestling and resting together and draw us into these kinds of relationships.

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. 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.

²¹ Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

²² I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

I. Introduction

Paul issues a pastoral warning against divisive teachers while affirming the Romans' obedience. He closes with personal greetings from companions and coworkers, reminding the church to remain wise and watchful.

II. Exposition and Reflection

1. Watchfulness Against Division (vv. 17–18)

- Paul's command is twofold: identify those who cause division and "avoid" them. Actively separate from false teaching and divisive behavior.
 - Motives matter: such people serve their own appetites, not Christ's, and use flattery and deceit to convince others. Discernment is a grace-required skill.
 - Application: Train elders and members to recognize false teaching by comparing doctrine and practice with Scripture; respond in charity but firm separation when persistence in error threatens the flock.
 - Reflect: What practical steps can our church take to guard unity without becoming legalistic or unloving?
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2. Commendation and Call to Wisdom (v. 19–20)

- Paul rejoices at their obedience but urges wisdom about what is good and innocence regarding evil. Obedience must be paired with biblical discernment.

- The promised victory, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” gives biblical hope that resistance to evil is ultimately God’s work, which frees believers to act in faith.
 - Application: Combine faithful obedience (teaching, worship, care) with training in discernment, knowing truth and avoiding snares.
 - Reflect: Are we equipping people both to obey and to discern? What resources would help?
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3. Personal Connections and Civic Witness (vv. 21–23)

- Paul names coworkers and hosts (Gaius, Erastus the city treasurer). These names show the church’s social spread, including influence in public offices.
 - The presence of an official (city treasurer) among believers is a reminder that Christian witness extends into civic spheres.
 - Application: Encourage members in public service to see their offices as fields for faithful witness and service.
 - Reflect: How can we better support members who serve in public or civic roles?
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Kevin DeYoung, *Are You Sunshine or a Cloud?*

Encouragement means highlighting the evidences of God’s grace in the gospel or in a gospel-centered person to the glory of God. Each part of that definition is important. Encouragement is not spotlighting a person, but underlining God’s grace. It is not about simply commending nice people to make them feel good, but about commending the work of the gospel in others to glory of God.

The definition above can help *differentiate encouragement from flattery*.

Encouragement is based on what is true about a person. Flattery affirms through exaggeration or falsehood. Encouragement keeps human praise in proportion, lifting everything up for God’s praise. Flattery gives too much influence to human agency. Encouragement blesses for the sake of the blessed and the Blessed One. Flattery harbors ulterior motives and looks for favors or reciprocal affirmation. While God despises flattery, he delights to see Christians encourage each other.

Notice four characteristics of Paul’s encouragement in Romans 16:

First, he recognized others publicly. Paul had never been to the church at Rome. But he knew some of the members through his travels. Others he had heard about. And he likes what he’s seen and heard. So he tells the whole church, in front of

everyone. He does this in all his letters. He holds up Tychicus as a faithful minister in the Lord (Eph. 6:21) and Epaphroditus as a fellow worker and fellow soldier (Phil. 2:25). He goes out of his way to encourage, speaking of “Luke the beloved physician” when plain old “Luke” would have sufficed. We probably don’t think of Paul has a great encourager, more of a champion of the gospel or defender of the faith, but the only reason we don’t see him encouraging others is because it happens so frequently.

Second, Paul was tender in expressing his affections. Epaphroditus, Ampliatus, Stachys, and Persis are all beloved to him. Rufus’ mother could have been his own mother their bond was so close (Rom. 16:13). Elsewhere, Paul tells the Philippians he holds them in his heart and yearns for them with the affection of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:7). He has abundant love for the Corinthians (the Corinthians!) and is happy to live and die with them (2 Cor. 2:4; 11:11). Perhaps people find us discouraging or intimidating because they sense no warmth. Our praise is always perfunctory, never tender. There’s a difference between saying “you’re in my thoughts” and telling someone “I hold you in my heart.”

Third, Paul’s encouragement was rooted in his love for the gospel. He doesn’t simply commend people for being really good at something. He honors them for the work of God he sees in and through them. These are fellow workers, fellow servants, fellow saints. Paul’s heart beats with gratitude because God saved these men and women and now uses them to bless others. The strongest bonds of friendship should be gospel bonds. The deepest affections ought to be stirred in us, not because we like the same movies and music or come from the same place and root for the same teams, but because we share the same passion for, an identity in, the gospel. These “greetings” are more than secular “hellos.” They are signs of church-wide solidarity growing out of our communion together through our union with Christ.

Fourth, Paul didn’t just encourage his friends and co-laborers, he cultivated an atmosphere of appreciation and affection in the whole church. He greets them, but then tells them to greet each other. Go meet Philologus. Stop by and see Julia. Give my regards to Nereus. Paul is fostering community. He even encourages signs of physical affection. The sign is not as important as the thing signified. Whether it’s a kiss, a hug, a hearty handshake, or a super sweet fist bump, Paul understood that God gave us bodies and wants us to use them appropriately to encourage others.

Paul wanted the church to be quick to encourage, not quick to condemn. He wanted them overflowing in praise, instead of overflowing in criticism. He wanted the church to be warm and invigorating, not cold and life quenching. He didn’t

want a church of boasters or flatterers. But he wanted a congregation where the members sought to honor one another above themselves, a place where God's grace was noticed and lifted up for the glory of God. He wanted more sunshine, fewer clouds.

Paul's love for encouragement makes sense because God is the great encourager. He is always rejoicing in the truth. He loves to highlight his own grace and glory. He called Jesus his beloved Son and speaks just as kindly to us—beloved, little children, new creations, holy ones. Because of the work of Christ, God accepts us when he would otherwise reject us, which means he can encourage instead of condemn. And by this same work of Christ, we can encourage all those who belong to Christ.

R. C. Sproul, *Avoiding False Teachers*

Since Rome was the capital city of the empire, it was inevitable that such teachers would make their way to that important metropolis, and Paul did not want the Christians there to be caught off guard. As for why Paul does not mention the danger of false teachers until he is almost finished with his letter, some commentators suggest that perhaps it is because they were not yet in the city, and so the concern was not immediately pressing. Others speculate that maybe Paul heard about false teachers in Rome only after he had started writing, so he puts the warning at the end because that is where he was in the writing process.

The Apostle's admonition is the same one that he gave to the Ephesian elders, namely, to be on their guard against the false teachers who might infiltrate the flock (Rom. 16:17; see Acts 20:29-31). Paul warns that these false teachers will attempt to divide the church and will introduce obstacles that are contrary to true doctrine. He has serious error in mind, for the word obstacle in the Greek connotes a spiritual problem that will result in damnation if it takes root in a person's life. The Apostle wants his audience to be careful about those who would divide professing Christians who affirm the true Apostolic faith and to look out for those who teach soul-damning doctrine.

False teaching was by no means a problem limited to the early church; it is something we face today. We must take care not to divide over nonessential matters, but we can have unity with other professing believers only insofar as they stand for the gospel (Rom. 14:1-15:7; Gal. 1:8-9). John Calvin comments, "It is indeed an impious and sacrilegious attempt to divide those who agree in the truth of Christ: but yet it is a shameful sophistry to defend, under the pretext of peace and unity, a union in lies and impious doctrines."

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.

I. Introduction

Paul ends with a classic Pauline doxology: praise to God who is able to strengthen believers by the gospel. The “mystery” long hidden is now revealed and proclaimed to all nations and this disclosure produces the “obedience of faith.”

II. Exposition and Reflection

1. God’s Power to Strengthen (v. 25)

- The doxology begins with God’s ability to strengthen believers “according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” The gospel is both the message and the means of God’s strengthening.
 - Application: Preach and receive the gospel frequently; rely on God’s strengthening power rather than on human resolve alone.
 - Reflect: In what ways do you rely on the gospel itself (not merely programs) to strengthen you?
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2. The Revelation of the Mystery (v. 26)

- The “mystery” was hidden in past ages but now disclosed, fulfilled in Christ and attested through prophetic writings (Scripture) to the nations, thus the mission to the Gentiles is the fruit of God’s plan.
 - The “obedience of faith” ties missionary proclamation to the response of conversion and life-change.
 - Application: Support global mission as the natural outcome of God’s revealed plan; teach that mission produces obedient faith.
 - Reflect: How can you be more intentional in the global proclamation that aims at the “obedience of faith”?
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3. God’s Glory Through Christ (v. 27)

- The final doxology centers all glory on the “only wise God” through Jesus Christ. Worship is the end (purpose) of revelation and mission.
- Application: Let every aspect of ministry (teaching, giving, sending) be ordered toward God’s glory in Christ.
- Reflect: Does your personal calendar and ministry involvement reflect the priority of God’s glory in Christ?

Charles Spurgeon, *Romans, but not Romanists*

I desire to love all the Lord’s people, but there are some of them whom I can love best while I know the least about them, and feel the most comfort in them when I have not seen them for a month or so. There are Christian people whom you could live with in heaven comfortably enough, but it is a severe trial to bear with them on earth, although you feel that they are good people, and since God puts up with them, so ought you. Since there are such peculiar people do not be always getting in their way to irritate them — leave them alone, and seek peace by keeping out of their way. Brethren, let us love one another; by all means let us love one another, for love is of God. But let us all try to be lovable, so as to make this duty as easy as possible to our brethren.

Once more, love among Christians in those early days was wont to respect seniority in spiritual life; for Paul speaks of some who were in Christ before himself. Among us I hope there always will be profound esteem for those who have been longest in Christ, for those who have stood the test of years, for our aged members, the elders and the matrons among us. Reverence to old age is but a natural duty, but reverence to advanced Christians is a privilege as well. Let it always be so among us.

And the last word is this; love to all Christians should make us recollect even the most obscure and mean members of the church. When the apostle Paul wrote, “Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hernias,” why, many of us say, “Whoever were these good people?” And when he goes on to mention, “Patrobas, Hermes,” we ask, “And who were they? What did these men attempt or perform? Is that all? Philologus, who was he? and who was Olympas? We know next to nothing about those good people.” They were like the most of us, commonplace individuals; but they loved the Lord, and therefore as Paul recollected their names he sent them a message of love which has become embalmed in the Holy Scriptures. Do not let us think of the distinguished Christians exclusively so as to forget the rank and file of the Lord’s army. Do not let the eye rest exclusively upon the front rank, but let us love all whom Christ loves; let us value all Christ’s servants. It is better to be God’s

dog than to be the devil's darling. It were better to be the meanest Christian than to be the greatest sinner. If Christ is in them, and they are in Christ, and you are a Christian, let your heart go out towards them.

And now, finally, may grace, mercy, and peace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ; and may we labour to promote unity and love among his people. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly, may we therefore in patience possess our souls. O that those who are not yet numbered among the people of the Lord may be brought in through faith in Jesus Christ to his glory! Amen.

John MacArthur, *The Unveiling of God's Secret*

Would to God that doxologies were on our lips more often! And so he gives praise to God for the glorious, saving gospel.

What does this say to us? What does this say to you and me? Well let's talk about an unbeliever. Let's say you're here tonight, you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, what does this say to you? Well it says to you this, you have never been established. You have never been lifted up from your sin. You are in a situation of alienation from God, of fallenness. You are in a situation of heading for the judgment of God. And what it says to you is, turn your eyes to Jesus Christ and look at the work that He did for you and believe in that work that you might be established and that you might receive all the things that come to you because of your faith in Jesus Christ and enter into this fellowship of love of all those who embrace the Savior.

But what does this say to a believer? Most of us tonight love the Lord. What does it say to us? It says our hearts ought to be filled with what? With praise, first of all. It ought to be that it spontaneously rises from our lips that we praise God. It ought to be that as we would come to the end of any thought about the gospel we would launch into the same kind of praise and doxology that Paul does.

Furthermore, it causes me to remember that Christ didn't do this wonderful work so that I could continue to live in sin, right? So the very reminder of this work calls me to a renewed commitment to holiness. I wasn't given the fullness of salvation by the perfect work of Jesus Christ so that I could give back God a disobedient life, was I? The Lord didn't do all of that for me so that I could serve Him with a half of a heart. And furthermore, it reminds me that He saved us to put us into a great fellowship and that I want to give all to that fellowship that is in me to give, don't you? I'm a part of the unveiling of the mystery hidden from ages past and now revealed. Should we not praise God that we are a part of what He has done?

David Mathis, *The Best-Known Hymn in History*

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

These 25 words, known to many around the world today as “The Doxology,” comprise what is likely the single best-known verse of all Christian hymnology and poetry.

On the surface, these lyrics are surprisingly modest and memorable. Few of us remember first hearing them, and few recall straining to learn them. Yet, as simple and accessible as these four lines are, Christians have been singing them now for more than three centuries. Because simple doesn’t mean shallow. Plain does not exclude profound. Which is one of the striking truths at the heart of our faith — and one of the great evidences for its truth — from the Gospel of John, to the early creeds, to the most widely known and enduring lyrics we share with the global church today.

The greatest realities about God and his world, when understood aright, can be captured in the humblest of terms, even as they are bottomless in their depth. And yet we find an enduring quality in “The Doxology” absent from many of our passing modern choruses. Substance hides in the brevity and singability. Though short, the hymn is a coherent progression, rather than a loosely connected attempt at memorable phrases, and turns on the profound theological truths of God’s aseity and generosity, and God as Trinity.

What, then, has been the power of these 25 words? Why have they endured, and for many become one of the most basic and repeated expressions of the Christian faith?

For one, our God is indeed the one from whom all genuine blessings flow. He himself is the Blessed One (1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15), the only one in whom is fullness of joy and pleasures forever (Psalms 16:11). Yet, unshakably happy as he is, he is not a God inclined to keep to himself but gives generously. He is happy enough to be outgoing.

God delights to give, to overflow with joy, to bless his creatures and share his own happiness in them and then with them. He is the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17). “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).