

Romans 16. To God be the glory. 27th September 2026

Prayer: And so we reach the end of Romans!

I admit I often skip over the chapters in the bible that are full of genealogies or long lists of names – but I love Romans 16, even though Paul has included a very long list of greetings! Do you know why I love this chapter?

Because of all the women Paul not just mentions but praises.

As a woman in leadership and ministry in the church – who has been challenged from some as to my calling and role to lead and preach to a mixed gender congregation – Romans 16 is so affirming.

I grieve those who take sections of Paul's letters, namely in Corinthians, Ephesians and Timothy, out of context and conclude that Paul instructs women to silence and submission.

I also know women who think Paul is a misogynist and don't like him very much!

I think nothing is further from the truth. Paul is very clear that all people are equal under God in Christ. In his letter to the Galatians (3:28) he says there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.

The great theologian Tom Wright starts by pointing people to Romans 16 and Phoebe when asked about women preachers. He says that Paul had male apostles he could have sent to Rome with his letter, but he chose Phoebe, a businesswoman from East of Corinth and she was probably the first one to read it aloud to the churches in Rome and explain it...that is, preach it!

Phoebe is described as a sister in Christ and a deacon – one who served in the church. Not only that but she was a benefactor, a patron of Paul and many others. A remarkable female leader held in high esteem by Paul.

He then sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila – his co-workers. Priscilla is named before her husband likely denoting her leadership and standing. We meet this couple in Acts 18 and it is Priscilla's name that is first again as they instruct Apollos, explaining the gospel to him more accurately.

So much for Paul disapproving of women teaching men!

I think Paul models Jesus' regard for women. Who did Jesus first appear to after he rose from the dead, and sent off to tell the male disciples the good news? - Women, the first to believe in the resurrection and the first to proclaim it!

Then he greets Andronicus and Junia who had been in prison with him and were “outstanding” among the apostles. Junia a female apostle! Sadly, there have been some over time who added an “s” to Junia to make her male as they couldn’t believe Paul would speak of a female apostle! However, this has been strongly disproved and Junia is clearly a woman – and an outstanding apostle.

Then there’s Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus’s mother, Julia and Nereus’ sister who all work very hard for the Lord.

This list of women is amazing for the time. But this list of women and men are all part of the growing church under Christ – all equal – all called to be new creations giving glory and using the gifts God has given them for the building up of the church. The Holy Spirit poured out on sons and daughters.

Enough of my passion for Romans 16 in regard to Paul’s position on women in leadership in the Church. (Happy to speak to anyone who has questions at another time 😊)

Now to the rest of the chapter.

Paul warns them against false teachers and those who may cause division. Paul has been clear on the truth of the gospel in his letter, the essential matters of faith in Jesus and his gift of grace. And his desire for acceptance of our Christian brothers and sisters who hold to the same core truths.

We too need to be on guard, to discern any teaching that is contrary to the gospel. While we love our brothers and sisters across the denominations – there may be some areas where we firmly disagree, doctrines that challenge the gospel of free grace. I was sorry to hear recently someone who had been at a Roman Catholic service where penance, like saying the rosary several times, is still seen and taught by some as essential to receive God’s forgiveness. Paul is clear that Jesus has paid the price, and that as we confess we are forgiven, though he desires us to turn from our sin and follow him more closely, being transformed more into his likeness.

We need to look out for Satan who will try to deceive us and whisper non-truths into our ears. Jesus has defeated sin and death, but until he returns the devil prowls around to trick us.

Paul prays that the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with his readers.

Others then send their greetings to the church in Rome, including his great friend Timothy, and I love that the scribe of the letter, Tertius, includes his greetings. It makes the letter so authentic.

Then there is Erastus, director of public works, whose name is still clearly legible on a marble pavement close to the old ruins of Corinth. Michael and I have seen it and can vouch for this!

The range of people show how the church was made up of slave and free, Jew and Gentile, men and women and those in high public positions.

Before I get to the final doxology, let's pause a minute and reflect on what we have learnt in this rich letter of Paul's – his longest and most significant letter.

What are your takeaways?

Our Christian faith is based on belief in Jesus – his death and resurrection.

Saved by grace not works – freedom from the law. No condemnation.

All are equal – those who put their faith and trust in Jesus become adopted in God's family.

We are filled with the Holy Spirit to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

To love and give glory to God and to love others, not to judge.

There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We have hope in future glory....

I encourage you to read the letter from beginning to end soon to solidify what we have been learning.

Paul then finishes with a beautiful doxology, a hymn of praise to God.

He affirms that it is God who establishes us in the faith of the gospel – the message of Jesus Christ who was foretold by the prophets. Jesus now made known and revealed to all so that Jew and Gentile alike can be in his family. He commits his words and praise to the eternal wise God – the one and only God. To him be the glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

And to repeat last weeks prayer from Paul I conclude...*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*