



The Book of  
**ROMANS**

**Small Group Study 4: Romans 12–16**

# Week Six: Romans 16:1–27

## Key Verses

- “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept silent for long ages but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God to advance the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles — to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ — to him be the glory forever! Amen.” - Romans 16:25–27 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- No one grows in the gospel by themselves.
- The unity and equality we have in the body of Christ transcends that which would otherwise divide us.
- We must elevate, as Paul did, one’s identity in Christ above all, not their ministry accomplishments.

## Read

Most readers of Romans are liable to pick up the pace once they reach Romans 16. After all, it begins with a list of names, which are not only difficult to read but also can seem boring and irrelevant to our spiritual life today. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Consider, for instance, that Paul did not merely list names. He listed names with history and with meaning. Prisca and Aquila risked their necks for Paul (16:4). Mary worked hard for the Roman believers (16:6). Andronicus and Junia were people who the apostles themselves mentioned with reverent awe (16:7). Rufus’ mother was so dear to Paul that she was like a mother to him (16:13).

Leading this list is a woman named Phoebe. Phoebe was Paul’s benefactor (16:2), an honored role in the ancient world, which refers to someone who commissioned and funded the work of a specialist. In this case, Phoebe funded Paul’s ministry as a missionary. In addition to her role as Paul’s patron, Phoebe was also the one entrusted with the actual letter to the Romans. The text of Romans 16 does not mention this directly, but commentators throughout church history acknowledge this point. As such, consider the trust Paul must have had in Phoebe. The greatest letter ever written was brought to the Romans not by Paul’s hand but by Phoebe’s. Consider too the weighty privilege Phoebe bore. Paul may have written the book of Romans, but Phoebe was the first to read it aloud to the Roman

believers. These names in Romans 16 must not be glossed over. On the whole, Paul's use of these names reminds us of several important truths.

The first thing that we can understand from this list is that **no one grows in the gospel by themselves**. The Apostle Paul was Christianity's most effective missionary and most influential theologian. And yet, even he recognized that his journey of faith was a group effort. There is no sense of "lone ranger Christianity" here, nor even an echo of bravado or pride. As Paul closes his letter, he is overcome with how profoundly he has been helped by others. If this was true of Paul, how much more is this true of us? This should be an encouragement for us to reflect on the people that have helped us along in our journey with Christ.

As we've discussed in previous studies, unity has been a key subject for Paul. We see this even in Paul's list of names. **The unity and equality we have in the body of Christ transcends that which would otherwise divide us**. In this list are rich and poor believers alike, Jews and Gentiles, men and women. Drawing together people from various backgrounds has never been easy, and in the Roman world of the first century, diversity like this was nearly unthinkable. Only the gospel could unite these women and men. Paul makes a striking display of the gospel's power by grouping these individuals together. The gospel has this same power for us today, and it is the only power that can create this type of unity.

Paul's assumptions about what makes a person valuable differ greatly from our own. Paul gives relatively little detail about the names here, and for most of the people in this list, the rest of the New Testament gives no other information. Yet the little that Paul chooses to mention (or, rather, not mention) is telling. We know nothing at all about the physical appearance of any of them. We are not given their job titles. We are not even told about their ministry successes. Instead, we are invited to think about their devotion to God and to one another. For Paul, nothing else seemed to matter. This greatly affects how we view others. **We must elevate, as Paul did, one's identity in Christ above all, not their ministry accomplishments.**

The last thing we can learn from this list is that believers are to love one another. To greet someone is to know them (Romans 16:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). Here is Paul, authoring Scripture itself, traveling the world in an effort to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth—and still not too busy to learn, remember, and mention the names of those who loved him well. For Paul, greeting someone by their name was not just polite. It was a way of saying, "I know you, I see you, and I love you." After all, this is how God has responded to us in the gospel. In Christ, God has known us, seen us, and loved us unconditionally and eternally. All Scripture is from the mouth of

the Lord. Because of this, there is so much to learn about him and the way he works, even in a list of names!

Paul shows that the people of God are to be known by their love. We are the people who know one another's struggles and choose compassion rather than judgment. As people called by the name of Christ, we are called to display a love like his as we are transformed to become more like him. Having learned this love from Christ—being a people called by his very name—we display a love like his in response to the love he's shown to us.

And that's where Paul fittingly ends the letter. Paul's words of praise in 16:25–27 connect to Paul's introduction to the letter in 1:1–7. Paul repeats some ideas in both sections to reinforce the significance of three themes. First, the gospel has been God's plan all along, stretching all the way back to the Old Testament writings. Paul even referenced Genesis 3:15 and made explicit how Jesus is fulfilling it in the gospel (Romans 16:20). Second, the plan of God's salvation extends to all nations, making a way for Jews and Gentiles to be part of the same family. Third, the gospel teaches an obedience of faith, which Paul has been explaining in Romans 12–16. This phrase "obedience of faith" means that our motivation to honor God with our actions flows from our gratitude of what he's done through the gospel, not from a desire to earn his approval. We build each other up in the faith through love, service, and unity, all of which we learn from Jesus' example.

That's Paul's wonderful and concise summary of the gospel in Romans: Through the sacrifice of Jesus, our righteous God made a way of salvation for all nations. To God be the glory!

## Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God's righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question *before* your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 16:1–27 in preparation for this week's study.**

### Highlight

Highlight Paul's commands in Romans 16:16–19.

Circle the promises that Paul makes in Romans 16:17–27.

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 16:17–27. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

Compare Romans 16:25–27 with the opening of the book, Romans 1:1–6. What similarities do you see? What themes from Romans 16:25–27 have been common themes in the entire book of Romans?

## **Explain**

Look at the list of names Paul mentions in Romans 16:1–16. How many of these are men and how many are women? What significance do you think this has for the church today?

Look at the list of names Paul mentions in Romans 16:1–16, this time focusing on the qualities Paul attributes to them. How does what Paul finds commendable differ from the values we tend to celebrate in our society today?

Why is the false teaching (16:17) from those who practice “smooth talk and flattering words” (16:18) so dangerous? How can separating from these people and avoiding them (16:17) preserve unity?

As we are at the end of the book, what are some passages in Romans that help us understand the relationship between faith and obedience? How would you summarize the relationship between faith and obedience in one sentence?

## Apply

Paul ended his letter with an extended “thank you” to all the people who had helped him grow in the gospel. Who has been essential in your spiritual journey, and how were they used by God in your life? (For example: Who first shared the gospel with you? Who taught you to read the Bible? Who encouraged you in difficult times? Who are the mothers and fathers and older brothers and sisters, the family of faith, that have loved you?)

What are some practical ways you can protect “the hearts of the unsuspecting” from deceit (16:18)? What are ways you can prevent yourself from becoming a person who causes division through false teaching?

Romans 16 displays a beautiful picture of unity among diverse members in the body of Christ, as brothers and sisters in the church—from various backgrounds—greet each other in Christ’s name. How does this unity in the body of Christ bring God glory? What next steps can you and your small group take to promote this type of unity in the church?

What are ways you are tempted to perceive obedience to God’s commands as contrary to faith in God? What are ways you can grow in faith that leads you to obedience to God?

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home *and* together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 16:1–27**

Read Romans 16:1–27

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Adore the eternal God, that he is beyond time and lives forever (16:26). Praise God because he is wise and the source of all wisdom (16:27), all knowledge, and all that is true. Worship God because he is the God of peace, rest, and order (16:20). Thank him that he is a God who offers that peace to us in Christ.
- **Confession:** Confess to God ways that you have wandered from the doctrine you have been taught (16:17). Ask the Spirit of God to reveal any ways your words or actions have caused unnecessary division for others in the body of Christ. Confess to God the ways that you choose to serve your own selfish appetites, desires, or interests instead of serving our Lord Jesus Christ (16:18).
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God by name for all the people who shared the gospel with you, have helped you grow in your faith, partnered with you in ministry, and brought you through difficult times (16:3–15). Thank Jesus that he is the God of all comfort and for motivating the rest of his church to edify one another.
- **Supplication:** Ask God to give us the desire to connect with others in a way that reflects the love of Christ. Ask God that our churches would be known for their genuine love (Romans 12:9). Ask God for strength where you need it today (16:25). Ask God to give you the joy to walk in faith and be obedient to his Word (16:26).