

# Introduction to Romans Chapter 16

Romans chapter 16 serves as the personal and relational conclusion to Paul's theological masterpiece. After unfolding the depths of sin, justification by faith, sanctification, God's sovereign purposes, Christian unity, and gospel mission, Paul closes not with abstract theology—but with names. The chapter is filled with commendations, greetings, warnings, and praise, reminding us that the gospel always produces real community among real people.

Paul begins by commending Phoebe, a faithful servant of the church, and then greets a wide range of coworkers—men and women, Jews and Gentiles, longtime companions and newer converts. These greetings reveal the diversity, unity, and partnership that characterized the early church. The gospel had broken down barriers of ethnicity, status, and background, forming one body in Christ.

Yet alongside warm affection, Paul issues a sober warning. He urges believers to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to sound doctrine. The church must balance love with vigilance, unity with doctrinal fidelity.

The chapter concludes with encouragement that the “God of peace” will soon crush Satan under their feet—a reminder that the mission of the church unfolds within a larger spiritual conflict, yet under the certainty of divine victory. Paul then ends with a soaring doxology, praising God for the revelation of the mystery now made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

Romans 16 shows that theology leads to fellowship, mission, discernment, and worship. It reminds us that the gospel is not merely believed—it is lived together in faithful partnership for the glory of God.

Heavenly Father,

As we open Romans chapter 16, thank You for the reminder that the gospel is lived out in real relationships and faithful service. Teach us to value every member of the body of Christ and to labor together in unity for Your glory.

Give us discernment to guard sound doctrine, courage to stand against division, and hearts full of gratitude for those who serve alongside us.

May our lives, like those named in this chapter, reflect faithfulness, love, and devotion to Christ.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

## **Romans 16:1–3**

**“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchreae. Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus.”**

## The Context:

Paul is shifting from deep theology to the people who make the mission possible.

- **Phoebe:** She is the "Courier." Since there was no USPS or FedEx, someone had to hand-deliver this letter from Corinth to Rome. Paul chose Phoebe, a businesswoman and leader from Cenchreae (a port city). By "commending" her, Paul is giving her his official stamp of approval, ensuring the Romans would host her and listen to the letter she brought.
- **Priscilla and Aquila:** This "Power Couple" had a fascinating history. They were tentmakers like Paul and had lived in Rome until the Emperor kicked all Jews out. They met Paul in Corinth, moved to Ephesus to start a church, and have now returned to Rome to lead again.

## The Meaning of "Worthy of Honor":

In modern American English, we'd say, "Treat her like a VIP," or "These are my ride-or-die partners in the work."

- **"A Deacon/Servant":** The word *diakonos* means "one who serves." Phoebe wasn't just a traveler; she was a recognized leader with a track record of "helping many."
- **"Welcome her in the Lord":** Paul is telling the Romans that their hospitality is a spiritual act. To welcome Phoebe is to welcome the message she carries.
- **"Co-workers":** Paul doesn't see himself as a "boss." He uses a word (*synergos*) that means "teammates." He views Priscilla and Aquila as equals in the struggle.

## The Core Lesson:

The Gospel moves through the "Ordinary Heroes" of the church. Paul is teaching us that **the most profound theology in the world (Romans 1–15) is useless without people (Chapter 16) who are willing to carry it, live it, and risk their lives for it.**

## The Illustration: The Relay Race

Imagine a high-stakes relay race.

Paul has spent months writing the "baton" (this letter). He has run his leg of the race. But the baton won't reach the finish line (the hearts of the Romans) unless a fast, reliable runner takes it across the sea.

Phoebe is that runner. She isn't just "carrying mail"; she is carrying the most influential document in Christian history. If she doesn't make it, or if the Romans don't "welcome" her, the mission fails.

## The "Teamwork" Reflection:

1. **The Phoebe Factor:** Am I someone people can trust with "important deliveries" (responsibilities, secrets, or leadership)?
2. **The VIP Check:** Do I show "honor" to the people in my life who serve behind the scenes, or do I only notice the "famous" leaders?
3. **The "Power Couple" Dynamic:** If you are in a relationship, are you and your partner "co-workers" for something bigger than yourselves, or are you just focused on your own comfort?

## Romans 16:4–7

**“They risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches. Also, give my greetings to the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first person from the province of Asia to become a follower of Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews and my fellow prisoners. They are highly respected among the apostles, and they were followers of Christ even before I was.”**

## The Context:

Paul is pulling back the curtain on the "cost" of the early church.

- **Priscilla and Aquila:** Paul says they "risked their necks" (literally, their throats) for him. We don't know the exact story, but at some point, they stood between Paul and a violent mob or a Roman executioner.
- **The House Church:** There were no "church buildings" yet. The church in Rome was a network of small groups meeting in living rooms.
- **Andronicus and Junia:** These are veterans of the faith. They were "in Christ" before Paul's famous Damascus Road conversion. They've also shared a prison cell with Paul, showing that being a Christian in the first century often meant having a criminal record.

## The Meaning of "Risky Their Necks":

In modern American English, we'd say, "They put their skin in the game," or "They're OGs (Originals) who have been in the trenches since day one."

- **"Risky their lives":** Loyalty isn't just a feeling; it's an action. Paul's ministry survived because people were willing to be his "human shield."
- **"Highly respected":** Paul highlights that leadership and respect aren't just about titles, but about longevity and sacrifice.
- **"My fellow prisoners":** There is a special bond between people who suffer together for a cause. Paul isn't just greeting "colleagues"; he's greeting "war buddies."

## The Core Lesson:

Faith is a team sport played in the "danger zone." Paul is teaching us that **the spread of the Gospel wasn't just about one man's preaching; it was about a brave community that supported, protected, and suffered for one another.**

## The Illustration: The Resistance Movement

Imagine a resistance movement in a country where the truth is banned.

- **The Heroes (Priscilla/Aquila):** They provide the safe house. They are the ones who distract the guards so the leader can escape through the back door.
- **The Veterans (Andronicus/Junia):** They are the ones who were fighting the good fight long before the current leaders arrived. They carry the scars of the struggle.

Romans 16:4–7 is Paul saying: "Don't just look at me. Look at the scars on Priscilla's neck and the prison dust on Junia's clothes. Without them, there is no mission."

## The "Loyalty" Check:

1. **The "Risk" Factor:** Who in my life have I been willing to "risk my neck" for? Am I a "fair-weather" friend or a "trench-mate"?
2. **The "Work" Factor:** Paul mentions Mary "worked very hard." Do I notice and thank the people in my community who do the "heavy lifting" behind the scenes?
3. **The "Predecessor" Factor:** Do I show respect to the "spiritual veterans" who paved the way for my own faith?

## Romans 16:8–10

**“Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has been tried and approved. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.”**

## The Context:

Paul continues his "roll call" of the Roman church, and although these names sound strange to us, they tell a story of a church that broke every social rule of the Roman Empire.

- **Ampliatus and Urbanus:** These were very common names for **slaves**. In the Roman world, a slave was "property," not a person. But Paul calls Ampliatus "my dear friend" and Urbanus "our co-worker." In the church, the slave and the free man stood on equal ground.

- **Apelles:** Paul says he has been "**tried and approved.**" This implies Apelles went through a specific, difficult test of his faith—perhaps a public trial or a period of intense persecution—and he didn't buckle. He came out the other side with "proven character."
- **The Household of Aristobulus:** Aristobulus was likely the grandson of Herod the Great and a friend of the Emperor. While Aristobulus himself might not have been a believer, his "household" (his slaves and staff) were. Paul is greeting a "pocket" of believers living right inside the halls of power.

## The Meaning of "Tried and Approved":

In modern American English, we'd say, "He's the real deal," or "He's been through the fire and didn't melt."

- **"My dear friend":** Paul uses the word *agapēton* (beloved). This shows the deep emotional bond in the early church. They weren't just "associates"; they were family.
- **"Household" believers:** This shows how the Gospel spreads—often from the "bottom up." The servants in a palace become Christians and form a small community of light in a dark, secular environment.

## The Core Lesson:

In Christ, your "status" is defined by your character, not your paycheck. Paul is teaching us that **the church is a place where a slave can be a "leader" and a member of a royal household can be a "servant."** What matters most is being "approved" by Christ through your faithfulness.

## The Illustration: The Level Ground

Imagine a Roman street. On one side is a grand palace, and on the other is a crowded slave quarters. In the city, these people would never speak to each other.

But on Sunday, they all walk into a small house. The slave (Ampliatius) sits next to the royal staff member. They share a meal and call each other "brother."

Romans 16:8–10 is Paul saying: "The world cares about your name and your master. But in here, we only care about your heart and your Savior."

## The "Identity" Check:

1. **The Status Check:** Do I treat people differently based on their job or their social standing, or do I see everyone as a "co-worker in Christ"?
2. **The "Tested" Check:** If my faith was "tried" today—by a difficult coworker, a financial crisis, or an insult—would I be "approved" as someone who stayed loyal to Jesus?

3. **The "Workplace" Check:** Like the household of Aristobulus, am I being a light for Christ in the specific "household" (office, school, or neighborhood) where God has placed me

### **Romans 16:11–13**

**“Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who belong to the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard for the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard for the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen by the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.”**

### **The Context:**

Paul continues to highlight the diverse faces of the Roman church, showing that the "family of God" is built on deep personal bonds.

- **The Household of Narcissus:** Narcissus was a famous, wealthy powerful man in Rome (likely a former slave of Emperor Claudius). Like the household of Aristobulus, Paul isn't greeting the powerful man himself, but the staff and workers under him who "belong to the Lord."
- **Tryphena and Tryphosa:** Their names actually mean "Dainty" and "Delicate." Paul adds a touch of wit here by noting that these "Delicate" women are actually **hard workers** for the Gospel. They were likely sisters or twins.
- **Rufus and his Mother:** Many scholars believe this is the same Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21, the son of Simon of Cyrene (the man who carried Jesus' cross). If so, the woman Paul greets is the widow of the man who helped Jesus. Paul's relationship with her was so close that he considers her his own "spiritual mother."

### **The Meaning of "Spiritual Family":**

In modern American English, we'd say, "She's like a mom to me," or "These people are the backbone of the organization."

- **"My fellow Jew":** Paul never loses sight of his roots. Even as the "Apostle to the Gentiles," he treasures his Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith.
- **"Mother to me, too":** This reveals Paul's heart. Despite being a world-traveling pioneer, he was often lonely and tired. He found comfort and "home" in the kindness of older women in the church who cared for him like a son.

### **The Core Lesson:**

The Church is more than a "club"; it is a family that replaces what we've lost. Paul is teaching us that **God provides "spiritual mothers" and "spiritual siblings" to sustain us when our biological families are far away or don't understand our faith.**

## The Illustration: The Family Tree of Faith

Imagine a large tree where branches from different origins have been grafted together.

Some branches come from the palace (Narcissus), some from the hard-working labor class (Persis), and some from the very beginning of the story (Rufus). Though they started in different places, they all draw life from the same roots.

## The "Spiritual Family" Reflection:

1. **The "Work" Check:** Like Tryphena and Persis, am I known for "working hard" for the Lord, even if my role isn't the most visible?
2. **The "Mother/Father" Check:** Who has been a "spiritual parent" to me? Have I reached out to thank them lately?
3. **The "Adoption" Check:** Is there someone younger in the faith that I could "mother" or "father" by providing them with the encouragement and "home" they need?

## Romans 16:14–16

**“Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who meet with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the believers who belong to them. Greet each other with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.”**

## The Context:

Paul wraps up his "shout-outs" with two more groups.

- **The House Churches:** By grouping these names together, Paul is likely addressing two distinct house churches. One group (v. 14) seems to be mostly men, while the second (v. 15) includes women like Julia and Nereus's sister. This shows that the Roman church was not one giant building, but a **network of small communities** spread across the city.
- **The Holy Kiss:** In the ancient Near East and Mediterranean, a kiss on the cheek was a standard greeting between family members or very close friends. By calling it "holy," Paul is saying, "When you see each other, express your affection as a spiritual family." It was a way to physically demonstrate that the barriers of class and race were gone.

## The Meaning of "All the Believers":

In modern American English, we'd say, "Give everyone a big hug for me," and "Remember, you're part of a global movement."

- **"Holy Kiss":** Today, we might use a warm handshake, a "bro-hug," or a sincere "It's so good to see you." The point isn't the specific gesture; it's the **genuine warmth** and lack of pretense between believers.

- **"All the churches send greetings"**: Paul reminds the Romans that they aren't alone. From Corinth to Ephesus to Jerusalem, there is a massive "family" of people they've never met who are cheering for them.

## **The Core Lesson:**

The church is a place of radical belonging. Paul is teaching us that **Christianity is meant to be deeply personal and affectionate**. It's not a cold philosophy; it's a community where names are known, and people are physically and emotionally welcomed.

## **The Illustration: The Global Network**

Imagine a map of a massive city like New York or London.

There isn't one giant "Main Office." Instead, there are dozens of little lights flickering in basements, apartments, and back rooms. These lights are the "Philologus and Julia" groups.

When Paul says "All the churches greet you," he's saying that if you could zoom out on that map, you'd see the whole world starting to glow with these little nodes of light. You might be a small group in Rome, but you are connected to the "Global Power Grid" of God's Kingdom.

## **The "Belonging" Reflection:**

1. **The "Small Group" Check:** Do I have a "house church" or a small group of people where my name is known and I am truly missed when I'm gone?
2. **The "Warmth" Check:** Am I a "cold" believer, or do I greet others with the kind of "holy" warmth that makes them feel like they truly belong?
3. **The "Big Picture" Check:** When I feel isolated in my faith, do I remember that there are millions of "brothers and sisters" across the globe who are on the same team?

## **What's Next?**

Just as Paul is about to finish, he pauses. He realizes that this beautiful "family" he just described is under threat. In **verses 17–20**, he gives a sharp, urgent warning about people who try to cause divisions and "trip up" the believers.

## **Romans 16:17–20**

**"I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because**

**of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”**

### **The Context:**

Paul has just spent 16 chapters building a "theology of unity." Now, at the very last minute, he pulls out a "Beware of Dog" sign. He knows that where God is building a family, someone will try to tear it down.

- **The "Smooth Talkers":** These aren't people outside the church; they are often people on the inside who use spiritual language to get what they want (money, power, or attention). Paul says they serve their "own appetites" (literally, their bellies).
- **Wise vs. Innocent:** Paul wants the Romans to be "experts" in doing good, but "clueless" when it comes to practicing evil.
- **The Big Promise:** In verse 20, Paul makes a direct reference back to the very first promise in the Bible (Genesis 3:15). He promises that the victory isn't just coming—it's going to be decisive.

### **The Meaning of "Crush Satan Under Your Feet":**

In modern American English, we'd say, "Don't let the drama-stirrers win," or "Keep your head up; the enemy's time is almost up."

- **"Watch out":** This implies an active, constant alertness. Don't be "naive."
- **"The God of Peace":** Notice the contrast. How do you defeat a "divider" (Satan)? Through the "God of Peace." Peace is the weapon that crushes the enemy.
- **"Under *your* feet":** God does the crushing, but He uses the feet of the unified church to do it.

### **The Core Lesson:**

Unity is something you have to protect, not just enjoy. Paul is teaching us that **protecting the church from "division-makers" is a spiritual battle, and the best way to win is to stay focused on the Good and stay together in Peace.**

### **The Illustration: The Counterfeit Inspector**

Imagine a person who works for the bank catching counterfeit money.

How do they become an expert? They don't spend all their time looking at every fake bill in the world. They spend all their time studying the **real thing**. They know the texture and the ink of a real bill so well that when a "smooth" fake comes along, they recognize it instantly.

Romans 16:17–20 is Paul saying: "You know the real Gospel—the one about love and grace. When someone shows up with a 'fake' version that causes fighting and feeds their own ego, don't argue with them. Just stay away."

### The "Watchman" Checklist:

1. **The "Fruit" Check:** Is this person's teaching leading to "righteousness, peace, and joy," or is it causing "division and obstacles"?
2. **The "Expertise" Check:** Am I spending more time studying "conspiracy theories" and "evil" than I am studying the "Good News"?
3. **The "Victory" Check:** When the church is under attack, do I react with "panic," or do I rest in the "God of Peace" who has already won the war?

### Romans 16:21–24

**“Timothy, my fellow worker, sends you his greetings, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives. I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.”**

### The Context:

Paul is sitting in a house in Corinth, finishing this masterpiece of a letter. He isn't alone; he's surrounded by a "team."

- **Timothy:** Paul's closest protégé and "spiritual son." He was with Paul through the highs and lows.
- **Tertius:** This is a fun "Easter egg." Paul usually dictated his letters to a professional scribe (an *amanuensis*). Here, Tertius actually speaks up and "breaks the fourth wall" to say hi! He was the one physically dipping the pen in ink for hours to get Romans onto the parchment.
- **Gaius and Erastus:** These men show the social reach of the church. Gaius is wealthy enough to host the whole local church, and Erastus is a high-ranking city official (an "Economos"). In 1929, archaeologists in Corinth actually found a stone pavement with Erastus's name on it!

### The Meaning of "Fellow Workers":

In modern American English, we'd say, "The whole crew says hi," or "This letter was a group effort."

- **"My relatives":** This could mean Paul's actual family or, more likely, his fellow Jewish countrymen who were working alongside him in Corinth.
- **"The whole church here":** It's a beautiful picture of "church-to-church" friendship. The church in Corinth is rooting for the church in Rome.

- **"Tertius, who wrote this":** This reminds us that the Bible was written by real people in real rooms with cramped hands and ink-stained fingers.

### **The Core Lesson:**

The message of God is a collaborative project. Paul is teaching us that **no matter how "anointed" a leader is, they need a team of scribes, hosts, and city officials to get the job done.** ---

### **The Illustration: The Credits Scene**

Imagine you are watching the end of a world-changing movie.

Most people only remember the lead actor (Paul). But as the credits roll, you see the names of the people who handled the lighting, the catering (Gaius), and the script (Tertius). Without the "crew," the movie never makes it to the screen.

Romans 16:21–24 is the "credits scene" of the book of Romans. Paul wants to make sure everyone knows that these "behind-the-scenes" people were vital to the mission.

### **The "Teamwork" Reflection:**

1. **The Tertius Check:** Am I willing to work in the background (like a scribe) to help someone else's vision come to life?
2. **The Erastus Check:** If I have a "secular" job with influence, do I use that position to bless my spiritual family?
3. **The "Team" Check:** Who are the "Timothys" and "Gaiuses" in my life who make my work possible? Have I given them a "shout-out" lately?

### **The Grand Finale:**

We have reached the very last section! Paul concludes with a "Doxology"—a final, poetic burst of praise that summarizes everything we've learned over the last 16 chapters.

### **Romans 16:25–27**

**“Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ reveals God’s plan that was kept secret for many years. But now, as the prophets predicted and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is being made known to people everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey Him. To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”**

## The Context:

This is the **Doxology**—the final "crescendo" of the letter. Paul brings all his massive themes (strength, the Gospel, the prophets, and the inclusion of all nations) and ties them into one final prayer of praise.

He uses the word "**Mystery**" (*mysterion*). In the Bible, a mystery isn't something "spooky"; it's a secret that was hidden in the past but has now been "unlocked." The secret was that God wasn't just saving one group of people, but was inviting the *whole world* into His family through Jesus. Paul ends exactly where he started: focusing on the wisdom and power of God.

## The Meaning of "The Only Wise God":

In modern American English, we'd say, "God knows exactly what He's doing," and "His plan is finally out in the open."

- "**Able to make you strong**": After talking about "the strong" and "the weak" in chapter 14, Paul reminds us that true strength comes from God, not our own efforts.
- "**Believe and obey**": Paul bookends the letter with this phrase (see Romans 1:5). The goal of the Gospel isn't just "thinking" the right things, but a life that is transformed by trust.
- "**To the only wise God**": Paul looks at the complexity of history, the law, and human nature, and realizes only a perfect, wise God could have woven it all together so beautifully.

## The Core Lesson:

The Gospel is the "Master Key" to history. Paul is teaching us that **everything in the Old Testament was leading up to this moment, and now that the secret is out, our job is to live out the "obedience of faith" and give God all the credit.**

## The Illustration: The Grand Reveal

Imagine a giant, complex puzzle that a family has been working on for generations.

For centuries, they only had a few pieces. They knew it would be beautiful, but they couldn't see the whole picture. Then, Jesus arrives with the final pieces. Suddenly, the image is clear! It's not just a picture of a house; it's a picture of the **entire world** being brought back to God.

Romans 16:25–27 is Paul saying: "The puzzle is finished! Look at how wise the Artist is! Now, let's show the whole world what the picture looks like."

## The "Final Reflection" on Romans:

1. **The Strength Check**: Am I relying on my own "theology" to be strong, or am I letting God "make me strong" through His grace?

2. **The Wisdom Check:** When my life feels like a "mystery" I can't solve, do I trust that the "only wise God" is still in control of the big picture?
3. **The "Amen" Check:** An "Amen" means "It is true" or "Let it be so." As you finish this book, can you say "Amen" to the idea that God's love is for everyone, including you?

**Congratulations! You have finished the Book of Romans.** You've traveled from the "bad news" of our human mess, through the "good news" of justification by faith, into the deep waters of God's sovereignty, and finally into the practical "street-level" love of the church.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the faithful servants and gospel partnerships reflected in this chapter. Help us to live in unity, to honor those who labor for Your name, and to serve with humility and perseverance.

Guard Your church from division and deception. Keep us grounded in sound doctrine and steadfast in love. Strengthen us with the promise that You, the God of peace, will fulfill every purpose and bring final victory through Jesus Christ.

To You be glory forever.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen.