

AM Romans 15:23-16:27 The Ending of Romans

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[0 : 00] This is from the book of Romans. Once again we're looking at how one of the books of God's word ends. Now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints, for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

[2 : 20] May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Kenchria, 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.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 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.

Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Eponetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.

Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.

[3 : 48] Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsmen Herodian. Greet those in the Lord, who belong to the family of Narcissus.

Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord.

Also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncretus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobus, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.

Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympus, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ greet you. 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.

[4 : 55] Avoid them. 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.

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.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you.

So do Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me, and to the whole church, greet you.

Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. 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, 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, to the only wise God be glory, forevermore, through Jesus Christ.

[6 : 42] Amen. What an amazing chapter of Scripture. Let's see. Well, Romans chapter 16 is an extraordinary, unique chapter of Scripture.

Of course, in a way, that's a silly thing to say, because each chapter and verse of Scripture is unique in its own way. But Romans 16 is special, because it gives a list to us of 26 specifically named people amongst a larger group being greeted, and it gives us a list of nine people doing the greeting.

There's no other chapter in the Bible remotely like that. A kind of old world wide web of Christians. And there are so many lessons to learn from this chapter, though it might fly in the face of our usual concept of the book of Romans. Romans, you might think, is for theologians, it's for Christian heavyweights.

After all, Augustine was converted through chapter 13, verses 13 and 14, and Martin Luther through chapter 1 and verse 17, though that was actually a quotation from the book of Habakkuk.

[8 : 17] And then John Wesley was converted by hearing a public reading of the preface to Luther's book on Romans. Surely this book is dense theology, and simple minds cannot hope to penetrate that.

Well, I don't think that is remotely correct. There's no doubt that this book is rich in instruction about God's plan of salvation.

And that fact, of course, in no way makes it impenetrable. Quite the reverse. I'm sure that if you set your minds to it, you would find that you already know loads of verses and phrases of the book of Romans by heart without even trying.

And that you understand what they mean as well. And if we look at chapter 1, verse 7, we find that Paul has addressed this letter to everyone in Rome with only two qualifications.

One is, firstly, that they're loved by God, and secondly, that they're called to be saints. That is to say, this letter's for everyone who has been, who's given their heart to Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

[9 : 49] That is to say, by extension, this book is for you and for me, all of us today. Now, the theological boffins, they don't help because they describe this book in two ways.

They describe it as being testamentary and prophylactic. Wow. Well, let me assure you there are much easier ways to say those and express those ideas.

things. The book sets out the gospel of Jesus. It is a clear declaration of what we believe.

Testimony, after all, is what we give in court.

And Paul in this book simply tells it like it is. It is the truth. Feel free to have a wee smile to yourselves when you realise that Romans largely is an explanation and analysis of what Almighty God himself articulates in seven monosyllables in the book of Habakkuk.

The just shall live by his faith. Romans tells us about being just or not just and being justified and how it applies to believing Gentiles as well as to Jews.

[11 : 25] It talks about the faith of Abraham, the friend of God and tells us that we too are God's friends through faith in Christ Jesus who at just the right time, chapter 5, gave up his life for the ungodly.

And in chapters 12 to 15 it gives us very practical lessons and instructions as to how to live out our faith as justified sinners, saved by faith.

And there's nothing complicated in the words of chapter 10 verse 9 telling us that if we confess with our mouth Jesus is Lord and if we believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead we shall be saved.

Full stop. Isn't that good? Well these first 15 chapters are indeed Paul's testament.

His statement of truth regarding the gospel. But the book is also a prophylactic. Now we're into prophylaxis in a big way in medicine.

[12 : 41] Prophylaxis are preventative medicines, the best of all medicine because it means that a disease doesn't develop in the first place. Like vaccines against malaria or chicken pox, much in the news recently.

Or lowering drugs that reduce the risk of blood vessel disease and heart attack and stroke. So this book of Romans is setting out the gospel with clarity so that as that church develops it will be secure in what is correct and not develop or drift wittingly or unwittingly into error in its thinking or practice.

Romans is preventative theology. You see Romans is also very special because unlike many other epistles written to churches Paul actually had founded for their encouragement and correction, Romans is written to somewhere Paul had never been.

He had no part in the founding of the church in Rome. Rome. The book was written in 57 AD or thereabouts in Corinth and Paul had not been to Rome ever.

Many people think the church was planted as a result of the dispersion of Christians that occurred in the aftermath of Stephen's martyrdom though paradoxically Paul did have a part in that.

[14:27] Some think that Andronicus and Junia the apostles mentioned in verse 7 were instrumental in the founding of the church in Rome. Now that the church was not a Paul plant didn't mean he didn't have a huge heart for the church and a huge longing to visit it.

The end of chapter 15 that we read tells us just how much he did want to visit and to visit Spain too and not on holiday. We know that in the end Paul got his wish after a long spell in jail in Caesarea and he reached Rome by as being a Roman citizen born into citizenship in his native Tarsus by using his citizens rights to appeal to Caesar when he was being unjustly treated in the judicial system in Judea.

Of course the journey to Rome was fraught with danger and the last two chapters of the book of Acts relate graphically for us the details of that voyage.

Why did Paul so want to go to Rome and to Spain? Was it just wanderlust? Did he like travelling? Well his list of near disasters and suffering on his journeys laid down in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 actually dispels that idea.

I think that Paul was such a shrewd communicator and his commission from the lips of the Lord Jesus recorded for us in Acts 26 15 to 19 left him in no doubt what he was doing and why.

[16:17] I'll read it to you. I have appeared to you for this purpose to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me said the Lord Jesus to Paul he had realised that the best way to spread the gospel was to stay in one place for a period of time a couple of years maybe and for people to come to him to hear the good news and at one point in

Acts chapter 19 verse 10 Luke claims that after Paul preached in Ephesus for two years all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord and we actually find the same pattern in due course in Rome recorded in Acts 28 where under the power and leading of the Holy Spirit Paul kept open house for two years and the gospel radiated all around the known world from the hub in Rome because of his house arrest there and why Spain why did he want to go to Spain well at that time Spain was famous for its orators and politicians and philosophers and Paul saw that country as another hub for accessing huge swathes of territory to hear the gospel about

Jesus scripture doesn't explicitly say what happened after Paul's first imprisonment in Rome at the end of Acts but many believe it can be pieced together that after two years he was released he went on a fourth missionary journey and he did indeed visit Spain before he was again incarcerated in Rome and this time martyred but it would be a big mistake to think that travel was uncommon or restricted in the first century AD anything but if there was one thing the Roman Empire did and did well it was to open up travel all around the Mediterranean by road and by sea now it could be argued that the art of letter writing has died and only business letters are taught in schools sometimes certainly electronic communications have radically altered how we get in touch with each other and I do hope that the reasoned revised careful heartfelt expression of ordered thought that constituted most letters does not die out so when did you last have the thrill of opening a handwritten letter well even love letters become texts or whatsapps doesn't have the same ring does it let's be thankful that

God's letter of love to us is embodied in holy scripture well in Paul's day wax tablets had largely been replaced by papyrus scrolls for more important documents and the custom was for longer

letters to be written by a scribe a so called amanuensis as the letter writer dictated and this certainly is the excuse given on Paul's behalf for the rather convoluted 15 verse sentences and sometimes disjointed grammar of his letters as I imagine he paced up and down dictating trying to keep his thoroughbred thoughts in check as the scribes struggled to keep up of course letter writing had issues in Paul's day not many people could write not many people could read so letters usually had to be read out read out loud to the recipient and another problem was that there was no postal service no letter box and no stamps of any class so letters had to be entrusted to an individual to take with them on a journey to wherever the recipient lived and that brings us back to Romans 16 where the scribe is called Tertius that's in verse 22 and there he even squeezes in a wee greeting of his own and it was Phoebe in verse 1 who was the letter carrier the post woman verses 1 and 2 are really interesting Paul was in Corinth in the house of Gaius verse 23 at the time of writing the letter and Cechria was the port of Corinth to the west of the city it was just a couple of miles away Corinth was south of Athens the capital of Greece and was actually sighted on a narrow isthmus of land and there was a large area of Greece south of that isthmus but Cechria a couple of miles away from Corinth was the port it was the

[22 : 49] Ardrossan for going to Italy Phoebe is described in some translations as a servant in others as a deacon or deaconess and this has become contentious in some eyes that a woman a woman might have held the position of a deacon in the church but this just reflects a failure to understand the Greek when Jesus spoke to rebuke John and James in Mark 10 45 over their desire for position whatever motivation whatever motivation they had his reply to them was that the son of man did not come to be served but to serve literally Christ did not come to be deaconed to but to deacon and to give his life as a ransom for many the word diaconess meant servant doulos another common word meant slave the most eminent followers of Christ were advised that they should be servants of Christ and slaves of Christ and that they should be servants of others and slaves of others in Christ's name men and women equal in their salvation and their service and in

God's sight were servants and slaves and Phoebe was such to the church in Kenchria she was trustworthy and intrepid and a traveller and that was the reason she carried Paul's letter and this part of the letter is an article of introduction it's actually a letter of recommendation we still do that don't we so and so is in full communion with such and such a church when they change where they live our friends and the brethren carry a letter with them when they travel to permit participating in communion when away from home though those practices seem to me to be over formalising what's described here Phoebe anyway was a special lady who had been a great help to many people different translations for a great help include has been a patron or benefactor or succorer including to Paul next up in verses 3 and 4 are

Prisca or its diminutive form Priscilla and Aquila Paul recognises them as fellow workers in Christ Jesus and people who put their own necks on the line for Paul that is risked their lives for him they pop up quite a number of times in the New Testament in Acts 18 verse 2 they were banished from Rome where they lived by edict of Emperor Claudius who wrongly blamed Jews for a huge fire that gutted parts of Rome fake news there this was in AD 52 and they met Paul in Corinth on being banished then later we find them in Ephesus into Asia Minor in Acts 18 18 where they were instrumental in nurturing Apollos opening their home to him it says

Apollos from North Africa was a brilliant scholar who some believe was the author of Hebrews that's a debatable issue and they ran a house church there and we read that in 1 Corinthians 16 and 19 and then after Claudius' edict had expired they clearly had returned to Rome mentioned in verses 3 to 5 of Romans 16 and they're at it again in verse 5 there's a church that meets at their house that of course was the pattern in the early church the church was the people the building was by the way and as for cathedrals and auditoria they were unheard of the church meeting in my granny's sister's living room in the village in Hilton in Easter Ross when I was young had more in common with the early New Testament church than what we are doing here today but to finish with

Prisca and Aquila they seem not to have stayed in Rome because 2 Timothy 4 and 19 finds them back at Ephesus again well what amazing dynamism was there never a couple like them and an interesting aside is that contrary to convention it's never Aquila and Priscilla is it it's always the other way around it is possible that Prisca was a wealthy aristocrat hence she's named first and there's a smidgen of collateral evidence about this from other records but Aquila was a Jew from Pontus and Asia but they both had to leave Rome in any case if I read them correctly they were a unit and they would have stuck together anyway well time prevents an analysis of each of the 26 named

recipients you'll be pleased to know but we can draw out a few ideas from these verses the first is that many of the people in verses 5 to 16 are summed up by [28 : 57] Paul in a word or two for example those women who worked hard in the Lord verse 12 or Rufus chosen in the Lord verse 13 or Apelles tested and approved in Christ verse 10 I wonder if Paul had to summarise me or you in a phrase I wonder what his comment would be could do better lazy in the mornings easily distracted or tested and approved in Christ the second thing is that every church every church is made up of individual people salvation does not come as a block booking each person must enter a personal relationship acknowledging the Lord as master of their own lives and must keep up a meaningful relationship as time goes by talking to their saviour and listening to their saviour that's called prayer but each person has identity and that is where our identity lies it's in our individual relationship with

Christ even the twins Tryphena and Tryphosa in verse 12 are individuals the one name is translated or it means dainty and the other delicate but never mind they were workers and hard workers at that the next thing is it might not be apparent from reading the list but many of the names are common slaves names this list covers all echelons of society and where it says like in verse 10 greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus it is very likely that Aristobulus is the same Aristobulus who was a relative of Herod's and a close friend of Claudius the emperor you see Christians are salt and light savouring and enlightening even the darkest palace and the most irrational bigotry elsewhere remember

Paul talks in Philippians 4.22 of the believers the saints in Caesar's household these Christians get everywhere you know the next thing is some commentators have made much of how could Paul have known so many believers as 26 and their families and house church members when he had never been there well part of that is the enforced mobility of Jews banished from Rome by Claudius but eventually able to return so Paul had met many of these people face to face but also he would have learned of some of these people from Prisca and Aquila and others he spent years working alongside in Greece and Asia Minor so they in turn will have talked to Paul about people dear to them and so

Paul in these verses is showing interest in people whom he hopes one day to meet in the flesh the literal translation of greet is often understood to mean pay respects to so rather than trying to find fault with scripture if we accept God's word we find a beautiful picture opening up in front of us of brotherly love for many some of whom he may not actually have met yet have you never done that for someone you've never heard of but you pray for you've not physically met them but they may be the friend of a friend or a missionary and so on well why all these names here in Romans 16 and not in other letters I think that's just plain common sense you see Paul had not been to Rome he may not have met all these people personally in most of the other epistles he he founded the churches he knows the people and you know what it's like thanking people you remember to thank well

A and B but he forgets C and D and they take umbrage oh have you never that never happened to you well they may have been believers but they were human too so wise man Paul there are two specially lovely phrases that struck a chord with me one is used in verse 10 and this is the NIV translation it says it may be the same in ESV tested and approved in Christ how beautiful is that the genuine article tried and tested and there's another similar phrase in verse 13 chosen in the Lord chosen elect choice elite picked what I'm going to mention now

[34 : 53] I admit is conjecture but the conjecture that kind of makes sense back back in Mark's gospel and remember Mark's gospel was written for the church in Rome in chapter 15 verse 27 there it tells us of Simon from Cyrene who was dragooned into carrying the cross of Christ!

this must have seemed like a disaster for this Jew from North Africa who had probably saved for years for this trip to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem forced labor what had he done to deserve that?

But he's referred to in Mark's gospel as Simon the father of Alexander and Rufus now that bucks a trend throughout scripture where individuals were defined in terms not of their children but of their parents and grandparents certainly not their sons and this would imply that the sons were well known to those reading the letter or having it read to them and we learn that the first inroads of Christianity into Asia Minor!

were from believers from Cyprus and Cyrene including a certain Alexander but here in Rome we have Rufus chosen in the Lord and his mother who had been a mother to Paul too where had she

been a mother to him where had she mothered him Paul hadn't been to Rome but he had been to Asia Minor it's not out with the realms of possibility that Rufus mentioned in Romans 16 that Rufus father carried the cross he came to faith and he was responsible for a family of faith who lived for Christ we don't have documentary evidence this is conjecture but it warms your heart doesn't it our God's ways are past finding out and lastly

Paul has an awful job bringing the book to a conclusion have you noticed that having done the greetings he's back again with a solemn warning in verses 17 to 20 his warning could have applied to any of the churches and it could apply to churches today beware Christian brothers and sisters firstly of those who cause divisions dissension well how applicable is that to the church in Scotland over the centuries and secondly beware of those who put obstacles hindrances in the way of believers contrary to the prophylactic teaching of chapters 1 through 15 these people sweet talk literally sweet speech but evil actions they sweet talk the innocent the naive these people are from the devil and they should be resisted and Paul's prayer is that the

[38 : 23] Roman believers would be wise to the good and simple about evil that is guileless the word literally means undiluted like wine not mixed with water well what a way to be innocent undiluted in loving the good and hating the evil and Paul's emotions are really aroused by these deceivers and he comes away with such a strong statement the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet God's peace is not some passive weak emotion it's the peace and wholeness of strength justice and righteousness so in verses 21 to 23 it is as we might put it you're sincerely

Paul except it's not just Paul it's Paul Timothy Lucius Jason Sosipater Tertius Gaius Erastus what a responsible job for him possibly the city of Corinth treasurer a kind of former day Kate Forbes and Quartus but Paul's not quite done he then launches into the longest of his doxology come benedictions in all of his letters in verses 25 to 27 now the short version is now to him who is able to establish you to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ Amen and of course that is wonderful and it is inspired but spare a thought for Tertius the scribe he thought he had finished for the day he reached the years sincerely and he just squeezed in a personal greeting of his own but right there just as he finishes

Paul's away and one again he just has to explain how the Romans are to be established it is by the gospel that Jesus specifically revealed to him as one born out of due time he has said it is the gospel according to Paul totally compliant with the gospel according to Matthew Mark Luke and John and crucially totally in accord with the gospel from Genesis to Malachi too because all these gospels proclaim the lordship of Jesus Christ was that not what Jesus himself did when he met with the disciples after the resurrection opening their minds to see how he was the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy Luke 24 44 to 48 so this is it friends it all adds up scripture has been fulfilled to the letter the mystery of the old had had the light of

Christ dispel the darkness the shadows of prophecy this is by the express command and of our loving almighty God the eternal God and why so that all nations Jew and Gentile alike might believe and obey him and all the varied lives touched by the gospel listed in Romans 16 what a wonderful chapter of scripture right enough to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ Amen let's pray together