

The Credits

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[0 : 00] Well, Esther and Tim, I'm not sure what you did wrong at the camp last week, but obviously there was some punishment there to give you that passage.

The only one worse in the Bible is perhaps Nehemiah 3, but don't look that up. Let's pray as we come to the end of this series on Paul's letter to the Romans.

God, our Father, thank you for the richness and power of your word as in the letter to the Romans. Thank you for what we have learned and how it has changed us this year.

And speak to us even now from this last chapter, we pray, confirming us things that are true and strengthen us in the service of the gospel for the glory of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. I quite like watching the credits at the end of a film. And I get a bit annoyed if the people I'm with or the people sitting in front of me get up in the middle of the credits and walk out.

[1 : 02] I like to see all these names of people who do things. I sometimes wonder what all the jobs are, best grip and things like this. I'm sure they're made up. Just somebody pays money to get their name up on the screen is probably my guess.

But I mean, we had some credits at the end of the youth video tonight. There are only three. It didn't have a best boy or best grip or didn't have any of the sort of makeup artists or anything like that.

I was a bit disappointed. I thought we'd have quite a few credits. But next time, I'm sure they'll all be there at the end. Every man and his dog and woman seems to get a mention in some of these credits. In effect, we've come to Romans at the end of Romans and we're now at the credit stage.

In effect, Paul's argument, his exposition of the gospel and its implications for life, in effect is over at the end of chapter 15. And now it's, if you like, a bit like the credits.

It's a list of 26 individuals, many of whom have names that we would never name our children. But there's a challenge for some of you as well. And one thing it does remind us is that even though Paul in the letter to the Romans has painted this vast and glorious picture of the gospel of Jesus, the individual matters before God.

[2 : 16] Something that's always worth remembering, that every individual matters in God's eyes. It's not just about a big group of numbers.

It's not just about the grand themes of the spread of the gospel. But each and every person matters. Even those who are, in one sense, not the high-profile leaders like Paul and some of those who are mentioned.

Many of these, if not most of them, this is the only time they're mentioned. We don't really know much about them. But here they are in the Bible for eternity. And one day, presumably, most of them will meet in heaven.

In some senses, this list of credits gives us a little peek behind the scenes of the church. It's quite nice, really. Occasionally on TV, I gather, I never watch them, films about the making of a film or a film about the making of a book.

I'm more likely to read the book about the making of the book. But some of you would watch a film about the making of the film. It's a bit like that. It's a sort of behind-the-scenes sort of look at what's going on in church life in the first century A.D., a time so remote from us.

[3 : 24] Take Phoebe. She's mentioned first. Our newest church member is Phoebe. Phoebe's, what, 10 days old? No, more than that, 17 days old. And she was named after, I presume, this Phoebe here.

She's commended by Paul in verse 1. And a little bit is spoken of her. From her name, Phoebe, she's probably Greek. That would mean that she's a Gentile, not from a Jewish background.

It seems a traveler, perhaps doing business. She's probably wealthy because in verse 2 it says that she's been a benefactor of many. That is, somebody who's contributed money for probably, well, for

Paul certainly and others.

So probably for the ministry's sake. She's probably therefore wealthy and contributing for Christian ministers. She's the person, it seems, who will take this letter to Rome from Corinth, where Paul is writing.

Corinth is in Greece, near where the bushfires were a few weeks ago. And there's no sort of equivalent of Australia Post or Greek Post or anything in those days. There was no postal service. [4 : 27] People would have to hand deliver or get somebody to take a letter for them. And she's the person taking the letter. She's a deacon, we're told. In the church, that would be a leadership role, a servant role, but still nonetheless a leadership role.

It's mentioned that she's a deacon of the church at Cancria, which is the port city for Corinth. It's still a little port-type city today. You can see the ruins in the water where you can go swimming. And Corinth is on a sort of great big blob of land that has a very thin neck that goes across to Athens and the mainland of Greece. And today there's a canal through. Cancria's on the south side. And in Paul's day, they would have carted stuff over land because it was quicker to do that than go around this great big blob of land. So Cancria is the port from which presumably she may sail to Rome with this letter in her possession.

And Paul's words in verses 1 and 2 are a bit like his recommendation of her to Rome, where presumably she's not known, and to say to the church in Rome, welcome her, provide for her, look after her.

[5 : 32] She's a good person. This is my reference for her, if you like, when she comes with this letter. And then in verses 3 to 16, in the long list of all those complicated names, Paul extends his greetings to various Christians in Rome.

So Phoebe's taking the letter to Rome. Now he greets various people in Rome whom he either knows or knows about. Presumably not from Paul's own time in Rome.

He hasn't been there at this point. But perhaps people whom he's met at other places but who've now gone to Rome, the capital, of course, of the empire, and therefore a place that would draw people in trade and business to and from Rome.

Prisca or Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in verse 3. They're actually mentioned a number of times in the New Testament. This is not the only time. They're Jewish Christians, unlike Phoebe, who it seems is probably a Greek Gentile Christian.

They too are wealthy. They're tradespeople. We know from other references in the New Testament they were in Rome in 49 AD when Jews and Christians were expelled from Rome.

[6 : 40] And it seems they were expelled to Corinth. In Acts 18, they're in Ephesus where they've risked their lives, it seems, for the gospel. Now they're back in Rome. Later on in the New Testament, they'll be in Ephesus again in 2 Timothy chapter 4.

So it seems that they were perhaps tradespeople who would settle for a while and be active leaders in the church wherever they were settled. They host a church. In verse 5, it says, greet the church in their house.

No church buildings in the first century. Probably the first church buildings come from maybe 240 or 50 AD. There's some debate about this. And the earliest remnants of what seems to be a church building I actually saw last year on my trip in Syria, which they date to 240 AD.

In the Roman time before Rome was a Christian empire, it was pretty difficult to build a church building. So churches met in people's houses, usually in wealthy people's houses because they would have room.

And it seems for Priscilla and Aquila that was the case. They hosted a church in their house, something that still in persecuted countries happens. So in China, in Burma, where I was a few weeks ago, and other places, churches often meet in homes or people's apartments and so on.

[7 : 57] House churches are also mentioned later on in verses 14 and 15 in this list. And it seems that in Rome, it's not just one church meeting in a great big cathedral or anything like that.

Probably the Roman church is actually a number of congregations in different people's homes with good connections and unity between those congregations. So verse 14 and 15 seems to imply groups of Christians in people's homes, as well as the church that meets in the home earlier of Priscilla and Aquila.

Now, there's quite a deal of affection in Paul's greetings here. It's not just sort of, I'll greet this person and say hello to that. Oh, you better say hello to Auntie Mary, otherwise she'll get her nose

put out of joints and so on.

There's actually real affection in some of these greetings. So at the end of verse 5, greet my beloved Eponetus, who's the first convert in Asia for Christ. Now, Asia here means Western Turkey. We think of Asia being China, India and so on, but Asia Minor was a province of Turkey in the first century. Ephesus was its major city, then on the coast of the Aegean Sea, now slightly inland because the rivers silted up.

[9:10] And Ephesus being its big centre was the place that Paul spent more than a year, a couple of years even, ministering in. And it seems Eponetus is the first person there who was converted.

Now, for some reason, he's in Rome. Paul extends his greetings. He's beloved to Paul as the first convert in that place. And others in this list are also mentioned in terms of affection.

In verse 8, greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord, and so on. So Paul's got real friendships here in his ministry that he's extending greetings to in Rome.

He also acknowledges people who work hard as Christians. So in verse 6, Mary, who has worked very hard among you.

And then in verse 12, a number of women, Tryphena and Tryphosa, the workers in the Lord. And greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

[10:12] Now, every church needs hard workers. From the first day to this and beyond, basically the life of a church is really sustained by hard workers and not least hardworking volunteers.

They're often the unsung heroes. The hard workers are often the people behind the scenes, evangelising or pastoring, caring for, loving, administering the needs of a church or whatever it is. Often unnoticed. Often these days, when such people are acknowledged, they're acknowledged in terms like, we want to acknowledge Fred, who's worked so hard for this church.

That's not what Paul says. He talks about those who've worked hard in the Lord. And that's actually the primary focus or motive for working hard.

It's not for this church or for a church or for a church organisation. It's working hard in or for the Lord.

[11:19] That's actually our fundamental motive. And sometimes we lose that bigger sight and we think my job is to keep Holy Trinity running or to keep St. Swithin's over there running.

Especially when churches become small, the church becomes the focus, sadly, rather than working in the Lord and serving the Lord above all, which would mean working in the church, but not as the primary motive.

So Paul's comments are about those who work hard in the Lord. And they should remind us about our motivation for the jobs that we may do in this church or in other Christian circles.

That for all the energy we may expend, in a sense, working and labouring, it's for the Lord that we do it fundamentally and primarily. That should be our motive.

One of the features of this list is that nine out of the 26 people listed are women. Many of them are clearly leaders in the church in different ways.

[12:20] Some of them I've mentioned already. Priscilla, Phoebe, Mary, Trifosa, Trifema and Persis. There's others as well. Phoebe was a deacon.

In verse 7, it mentions Junia. Junia, presumably her husband is Andronicus. Junia and Andronicus are apostles. And we might think, oh, I don't know their names.

Surely I know the names of the apostles. And sometimes we think of the 12 apostles. Judas is out and replaced by Matthias and so on. But the word apostle, it seems, tends to be used in the New Testament.

It certainly includes people like Paul, who was not one of the 12, and Barnabas and others. Apostle probably is somebody who witnessed the risen Jesus. So that it was somebody who actually saw Jesus risen from the dead.

That's what qualifies, it seems, Paul to be an apostle in 1 Corinthians 15. And therefore, as a result of seeing the risen Lord Jesus, bear testimony to his resurrection in their own lives and ministry.

[13:24] And so here, it seems, Andronicus and Junia presumably had seen the risen Lord Jesus. That may have placed them in Jerusalem or in Galilee in those weeks after the resurrection and before the ascension of Jesus.

Could well do. If perhaps they were Jewish people first, they may well have been there for the festival of Pentecost before they went back to wherever they came from. And we know, of course, at the day of Pentecost, there were people from all over the world, in effect, there in Jerusalem for

that feast.

We're told in verse 7, We don't know where. Presumably, that's a time when Paul was imprisoned somewhere for being a Christian.

And maybe they also, like him, were in prison with him for being Christian. Not for any crime that we might consider a crime, but in prison for the sake of Christian faith.

Note, I guess, Junia, a woman, is also an apostle. Place of high respect in the early church, along with men as well.

[14 : 36] One of the features of the list is the diversity. We've seen a Greek woman, Phoebe. We've seen Jewish Christians, Priscilla, Aquila. We've seen wealthy. There are some here, presumably, who are poor.

The name Urbanus in verse 9, Ampliatus in verse 8. Apparently, are names more likely associated with lower classes than with upper classes. The names Herodian in verse 11, Aristobulus in verse 10.

They're royal names. They may be people associated in some direct or indirect way with royalty as well. There's Greek. There's Jew. There's male, female, rich, poor.

It's just a little shot, camera shot, if you like, a little snapshot of what the church, in effect, should be like. A mixture and diversity of race and socioeconomic sort of background and gender.

I must say, one of the huge delights of being at Holy Trinity is our mix of people who are part of our church. And even tonight, we did this in an all-age service a few months ago in the morning service.

[15 : 41] And we found that people in that service had either been born in or lived significant time in over 30 countries in the world. And it was actually very moving.

But then even tonight, Andrew's leading the service. He's from China in background, I think. Ash and Jasmine are helping to lead the singing from Iran. A person I'll bring in the data projector, I see rightly, is from South Africa.

There are other people here who are from Malaysia or Singapore or India or other places as well. Probably some plenty that I've missed out. And that's a fabulous and rich thing.

It's what the Christian church ought to be like. Like the verse that Andrew read at the beginning of the service. That in heaven, in fact, we find people of every tribe and nation gathered around the throne of God.

And the church on earth, in one sense, ought to be a bit of a snapshot of that. And I know that within our church as a whole at Holy Trinity, we have people who are lawyers and doctors. We have people who are truck drivers and bus drivers and painters and carpenters.

[16 : 42] We have people who are teachers and students and unemployed folk and nurses and carers. And the whole works. I think that's a fabulous mix. And it ought to be more and more the case, I think, in church life.

And that's what we see just a little glimpse of, I think, here in Romans 16 as well. Now, Paul greets lots of people and he ends this section of greetings with, in verse 16, greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ greet you. Well, we don't greet each other with a holy kiss anymore. Well, it may be because we're disobedient to scripture. It may be a statement of what they think is cultural.

Sometimes Anglican churches have a struggle to even have a polite handshake in what's called a greeting of peace. But there ought to be affection amongst Christians. I don't mean necessarily that we go around hugging and kissing each other, but that we actually express our relationships with each other in encouraging, edifying sorts of ways.

Paul doesn't say greet everybody, really. He says, yes, greet one another. But then he goes on in verse 17 to sound some notes of warning.

[17 : 56] I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses in opposition to the teaching that you have learned. Avoid them.

Avoid them. Keep out of their way. Well, there are some things to note about this false teaching. It's inconsistent with the gospel. That's what Paul is, in effect, saying in verse 17.

It's in opposition to the teaching that you've learned. And that is from Romans, the letter, presumably, as well as what they'd been taught by whoever planted the church in Romans. We should avoid those who teach other than what the Bible teaches us.

And such people don't actually serve Jesus. They may look as though they do. They may claim to do so. But actually, they don't. They serve themselves, really. Verse 18, Paul says, For such people do not serve our Lord Jesus, our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.

And by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. They may claim to be Christian. They may be ordained as so-called Christian ministers.

[19 : 06] But if they teach other than what the true gospel is, other than what the Bible is, and there are plenty of them, let me tell you, then actually they're not serving Jesus at all. And they're to be avoided.

Notice that they are persuasive. So they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. The end of verse 18 says, That is, sometimes the truth or the rather falsehood is portrayed in deceptive ways.

It means that you and I need discernment, need to assess what is taught, and to see whether it is actually right or not. And that's what Paul is, in effect, exhorting the Romans there.

Well, after expounding this glorious gospel through the letter to the Romans, it's an interesting question to ask, well, why would anybody teach otherwise? If the gospel is good news, if it is great news, if it is the best news, as it is, why does anyone teach something else?

Why would anyone follow someone who taught something else? Why settle for second best? It's an intriguing question. I think one of the reasons is, as verse 18 I think suggests, false teaching flatters us.

[20 : 24] It's smooth talk and flattery. And we like to be flattered. Pop psychology flatters us. That's why it's so popular.

The power of positive thinking. You can do it. You've got it within you. That's flattery. And people like flattery. They like to feel good about themselves and feel, well, yeah, I'm not bad, you know. I'm okay. You're okay. The gospel does not flatter us. The gospel gives us the truth that we are all, without exception, without exemption, sinners before God.

We all, without exception, without exemption, fall short of the glory of God. None of us does what is right. Not one. It's Paul's argument in the opening chapters of this letter.

We don't particularly like that. We don't like being told that we're sinners, though it's true. We would rather that we be flattered. We would rather that we be praised and lifted up and exalted and, you know, have bits of blue and white paper floating out of the sky on top of us or something like that.

[21 : 37] Medals round our necks. Pictures in the paper. That's the flattery of a very shallow world. But it's what so often people crave for. Flattery wins followers.

Flattery glorifies people. The gospel glorifies God. Flattery is what itching ears long to hear. But it's not true.

It's deceptive. It leads to hell and not to glory. And the greatest theme of Paul's letter to the Romans, the greatest theme, in fact, of the whole scriptures is that the glorious gospel of God concerning his son, Jesus Christ, brings glory to God.

Not to you and not to me. Oh, yes, ultimately we are glorified, as Romans 8 makes clear. But on that day when we are glorified, it's not because glory will come to us. It's that we're glorified in Christ and the glory goes to him.

The gospel glorifies God. Flattery and smooth talk and heresy glorifies me or you. And that's why it's attractive.

[22 : 47] And that's why it's deceptive. And that's why it's literally diabolical. The glorious gospel of God does not flatter us. It exposes our sinfulness.

It exposes our emptiness. It exposes our spiritual bankruptcy. That we have nothing in our hands to bring before an almighty God. And though the gospel may not flatter me, it saves me.

And that's actually what matters most. The gospel is God's powerful message of salvation for Jew and for Gentile.

And on the final day in the presence of God, what matters is not whether I'm flattered, but whether I'm saved by the gospel of God concerning his son, Jesus Christ.

Self-help gospels will not save me. Gospels of flattery will not save me. Gospels that say, you can do it, you can contribute, you're quite good, you're righteous.

[23 : 52] They're no help on the final day. But God and God alone in Jesus saves me. And that gospel directs all the glory to God.

And that's why Paul finishes this letter in praise of God. As he says at the beginning of verse 25, to God who is able to strengthen you. No one else can strengthen us but God.

To God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel. No other gospel but to the gospel that Paul has proclaimed here. Not his gospel in the sense that he devised it but his gospel in the sense that he proclaimed it.

No other gospel will save us. Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages. Not a mysterious myth that some clever people need to find a code for but rather something that was unclear but was revealed, disclosed is what Paul says in verse 26.

[25 : 02] And through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles. That is the gospel of Jesus crucified and resurrected and ascended and glorified. That's the gospel that's being disclosed.

And that's the gospel that can save. And it's God's gospel. To God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith.

Only the gospel of God brings about the obedience of faith. No other gospel does. No other message does. No gospel of flattery does that. The obedience of faith is the fruit only of the gospel of God concerning his son.

To the only wise God through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory forever and ever. You see in the end the credits at the end of Romans are not people credits.

there's one credit it's God. To God alone be the glory is what Paul's saying at the very end of this letter of Romans.

[26 : 23] All the glory and all the praise belongs to him and to him alone. Not to Paul not to Priscilla or Aquila not to Phoebe not to anybody else but to God and God alone.

And God's glory note is through Jesus Christ verse 27. The one who died in our place to take away our sin. The one who died as propitiation to avert God's wrath.

The one who proved that God's love will not fail us. All those glorious truths of this gospel that Romans has been so eloquent about. It's to God through Jesus Christ that all glory belongs.

Think what we have done. We as sinners have exchanged the glory of the living God for idols and lies. Romans 1.

We fall short of God's glory continuously. Romans 3. But Jesus enables us to boast in the hope of sharing in God's glory.

[27 : 33] Chapter 5. And so at the end of chapter 8 it is with certainty in Christ alone that we will on the final day be glorified in Christ in the presence of God.

All glory you see belongs to God. Not to us. We exchanged it for idols and lies and we fall short. It belongs to God through Jesus Christ because it's only in Christ that we have hope of sharing in God's glory and only in Christ that we can be confident of final glorification on the day of his return. That's the glory that matters. The glory of standing in the presence of God perfected in the image of Christ. The glory that God will look at you and say Paul Barker what an amazing job.

You are so different from what you were on earth. The glory for that doesn't go to you it goes to Jesus Christ who's made you that way and he will say that about each one of us. The glory on that day belongs to God and his son Jesus Christ and it's a lasting glory.

It will last for eternity. It will never fade or diminish or be replaced. Think how fleeting human glory is. Think of the glory of the coach and captain of Geelong yesterday on a day it'll be gone in a few months time.

[28 : 59] They'll be fighting for it all over again. It'll be some historic memory that'll be paraded out in a terribly humanistic shallow form in motorcades and memorabilia for centuries to come but it's glory that will not last.

Think how enduring the glory is of a fashion star. Gone here one day, gone the next. Think how lasting the glory of a politician. Eleven years or whatever it'll be.

It won't last for eternity. But God's glory is forever. Never fading, never perishing, never dying, never diminishing. Ten thousand days in the presence of God will not diminish the glory we will share and the glory of God himself in eternity.

And at the end we can but say Amen, so be it. Which is how this letter ends. It's true. That's what the Amen is about. We offer God our glory in words of praise.

We offer God our glory in lives lived for him in sacrificial living transformed by the gospel acceptable through Jesus Christ. And we wait the day when we will join the heavenly chorus around the throne of God who will sing and we will sing with them blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might.

[30 : 24] A sevenfold description of praise to a glorious God be to our God forever and ever. And we can but join with Paul at the end of this letter in saying Amen.