

- Paul expresses his favorable opinion regarding the Roman Christians (v. 14). He has written to them “**very boldly**” because of his special gift (“**the grace that was given me**”) from God to be an apostle (v. 15; Acts 9:15; Gal 1:16). He compares his ministry to a priest’s service (v. 16). The purpose (“**so that**”) of Paul’s priestly service is to offer Gentile converts as a sacrifice to God.
- What Paul said in **verses 15–16** might have been misunderstood. It might seem as if he is boasting about his achievements. However, in **verse 17**, Paul clarifies that he only boasts about the things God has accomplished through him.<sup>105</sup> Paul sees himself simply as an instrument that God is using. It is God, then, who deserves the credit for what has been accomplished. In **verse 18**, Paul **supports** (“**For**”) what he has just said by giving Christ credit for the Gentiles who have been converted. Notice the emphasis on the triune God, the Holy Spirit sanctifies (v. 16), Christ is the one who accomplishes salvation by dying for them (we know this from the other places in this letter and the rest of the NT), and converts are offered like sacrifices to the Father. Paul has no problem calling his accomplishments God’s accomplishments.
- At the end of **verse 18**, Paul refers to the goal of his ministry as “**the obedience of the Gentiles**” (i.e., their conversion), and the **means** by which he accomplished this goal (“**by**”) is through “**word and deed.**” At the beginning of **verse 19**, Paul further defines this means as through “**the power of signs and wonders**” and through “**the power of the Spirit.**” Some of Paul’s “deeds” have included spectacular signs or what we might call miracles. These spectacular signs validated Paul as God’s prophet at a significant turning point in God’s dealings with his people (see, e.g., Acts 13:11; 14:3, 9–10; 15:12; 16:18; 19:11–12; 20:10–11). These “deeds” are not still being used by God today, but he is still using the “word” as the means of converting sinners.
- However, everything that Paul has done, not just the outwardly spectacular, is summed up in his final statement as “**the power of the Spirit.**” Empowered by the Spirit, Paul’s ministry has resulted in the gospel being preached from Jerusalem to “Illyricum,” which is occupied today by the Balkan nations of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Montenegro.<sup>106</sup> Paul can say that he has “**fully preached**” the gospel between Jerusalem and the western banks of the Adriatic Sea because he has completed his mission of planting strategic congregations in the major cities of the regions between these two places. These strategically placed assemblies have been equipped to reach the rest of their regions.

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<sup>105</sup> The ESV translates v. 17 as, “In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.”

<sup>106</sup> This area would be north and west of Macedonia (the location of Thessalonica and Phillipi). The book of Acts does not explicitly describe Paul traveling to this area, but it likely took place after Paul left Ephesus on his third missionary journey and traveled through Macedonia on his way to Greece (Acts 20:1–2).

- Paul explains that he has been trying to preach about Christ in new places (“**not where Christ was already named,**” v. 20) rather than places where someone else has already preached (“**on another man’s foundation**”). Paul supports this strategy by quoting from Isaiah 52:15b in **verse 21**. This verse is part of a lengthy description of how Jesus as the Suffering Servant will save his people (Is 52:13–53:12), but it is especially appropriate because it refers to the salvation of Gentiles using priestly language (“He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him,” Is 52:15a; cf. Rom 12:1; 15:16).
2. Looking Ahead: Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain (15:22–29)
- Paul has wanted to come to Rome but has often been prevented **because** (“**This is why,**” v. 22) he has been busy completing the ministry described in verse 19. However, now that he has finished his ministry in the eastern half of the Mediterranean world, Paul hopes to relocate to Rome and use it as a base for ministry in the western Mediterranean, extending to **Spain (vv. 23–24, 28b)**. Paul believes that God can use the Roman believers as a means to advance the gospel to other areas.
  - However, before going to Spain, Paul must make a trip back to Jerusalem (**vv. 25, 28**). The **reason** (“**For,**” v. 26) for this trip back to Judea is to deliver the money that believers in Macedonia (e.g., in Philippi and Thessalonica) and Greece (e.g., Corinth, where Paul is likely writing this letter) collected for the “**poor among the Lord’s people** [or “the saints”] **in Jerusalem**” (cf. 1 Cor 15:1–2; 2 Cor 8:1ff).<sup>107</sup> When Paul says that he needs to go to Rome to “**put my seal on this fruit of theirs**” (v. 28 in NASB), he likely means that he, as the NIV’s translation makes clear, needs to make sure that the money arrives intact for its intended recipients.<sup>108</sup>
  - The believers in Macedonia and Greece were “**pleased**” to contribute, nobody forced them to do it, but Paul acknowledges that they had a moral obligation to help their fellow believers (v. 27). Gentiles are sharing in the promises given to the Jewish people and the salvation accomplished by the Jewish Messiah, so it was right for these Gentiles to share their material possession with these Jewish believers who, in a sense, had shared their spiritual things with them (cf. Rom 1:16; 4:13–16; 15:7–8). This sharing would be a tangible way for Gentile believers to demonstrate their recognition that they had been graciously included in the blessings promised to the

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<sup>107</sup> The men listed as travel companions of Paul in Acts 20:4 likely provided protection as Paul traveled with this large sum of money and also served as representatives from the churches sending the gift (cf. 1 Cor 16:3–4).

<sup>108</sup> “Containers holding goods for shipment, including agricultural products such as seed, were often ‘sealed’ . . . to make any tampering evident and to insure an intact delivery. Since Paul has used so much commercial language in this context, it is likely that this metaphor follows that pattern and refers to the safe delivery of the collection” (Thielman, 696).

Patriarchs (cf. Rom 11:17–24). Paul hopes that the gift will be a means of promoting the unity that he also urged on the part of the Roman Christians (cf. Rom 14).

- It is not clear whether “**the full measure of the blessing of Christ**” in **verse 29** refers to a blessing that Paul is confident he will receive from the Romans or a blessing that he hopes to be to them. It is possible that, as in 1:12, he is referring to the way he believes God will use them both to be a blessing to each other. Despite his strong statements in chapters 14 and 15, Paul is confident that God has equipped these Roman believers to advance the gospel, which leads to his following request.

### 3. A Request for Prayer (15:30–33)

- In **verses 30–31**, Paul asks the Roman Christians to pray for him. This is a tangible way that they can participate in his ministry. He refers to it as a “**struggle**.” It is not something that they can merely do because they cannot be part of Paul’s ministry; it is instead a vital part of the ministry. He has two specific requests. First, he asks them to pray for his safety in Judea (“**that I may be kept safe from unbelievers in Judea**”; notice that believers are those who “obey,” cf. v. 18, and unbelievers are those who are “disobedient”). Second, he asks them to pray that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would accept the gift (**v. 31b**). He is likely concerned that Jewish believers would be reluctant to receive money from those who did not keep the Law of Moses (and is perhaps concerned that Gentile believers in Rome would disapprove of the collection because it tied them to those who still did keep the Law of Moses) (Moo, 925). Paul assumes that prayers are a means God uses to accomplish his purposes, even the change of people’s attitudes.
- **Verse 32** gives the ultimate **goal** of these two prayer requests (“**so that**”). Paul wants to finish his mission to Jerusalem and then come to Rome with joy. “And Paul *did* get to Rome and experience some measure of joy and refreshment (see Phil. 1:12–19; 2:25–30), but he arrived there in Roman chains” (Moo, 927).<sup>109</sup> However, while Paul arrived in Rome through an unexpected method, the final chapters of the book of Acts show us that God did orchestrate events so that Paul’s life was spared on various occasions while in Judea (see esp. Acts 21:27–36; 22:22–29; 23:12–35, and God did cause the Jewish believers to accept the generous gift from the Greek churches and to praise him for his work among the Gentiles (Acts 21:17–20).
- Paul closes this section by including his own prayer that the “**God of peace**” would be with the Roman believers, who were themselves somewhat divided along Gentile

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<sup>109</sup> There is a lesson here regarding how God answers our prayers. “[God] may give us what we ask for; he may make us wait; he may decline. He may give us the goal of what we ask for, but by quite another means. . . . Just as God’s unexpected answer to Paul’s prayers was the best possible answer (precisely because it was God’s), so also his answers to our prayers will always be for his glory and his people’s good” (Carson quoted by Naselli, 191).

and Jewish lines (v. 33). This prayer concludes the main body of the letter (see esp. “Amen”).<sup>110</sup>

## B. Greetings (16:1–23)

### 1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1–2)

- It was customary in a first-century Greek letter to commend the letter’s courier, and Paul sometimes observed this custom in his epistles (see, e.g., Eph 6:21–22; Col 4:7–8), but here Paul spends more time than usual commending Phoebe who is carrying the letter to Rome.
- Phoebe is a member of the congregation of Cenchrea, a smaller city outside Corinth.
- She is described as a “**deacon**” or “servant” (NASB, ESV, CSB) of that congregation (v. 1). This word translated *deacon* (also in NRSV, NLT) can refer to a person’s servant or attendant (Matt 22:13; John 2:5, 9) and often describes how Christians serve Christ and others (Matt 20:26; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 12:26; 1 Cor 3:5). In Romans 13:4, Paul used the word twice to describe the government as God’s “servant,” and in 15:8, Paul has just used it to describe Christ, who became a “servant” for the Jewish people. Paul uses the word to describe himself in contexts with a similar meaning where it also could be translated as *minister* (2 Cor 3:6; 6:4: 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25). Paul uses it with this same sense for his fellow ministers (Col 1:7; 2 Tim 4:6), including Tychicus, who carried the letter to the Ephesian believers (Eph 6:21) and the letter to Colossae (Col 4:7). Paul also uses it for Satan’s “servants,” i.e., the “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13–15; two times in v. 15). However, the word is also used for an office in the church and translated as “deacon” (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12).<sup>111</sup>
- Since the word can be used for the office of a “deacon,” some argue that Phoebe was a deacon or deaconess in the church in Cenchrea (e.g., Moo, 930; Schreiner, 787; Thielman, 710: cf. NIV, NRSV). Paul could also simply describe Phoebe as a “servant” in the same sense that he describes himself as a servant. The office of a deacon was not necessarily an administrative position and did not require the ability to teach. However, a deacon serves an essential function by assisting the pastors/elders with the congregation’s physical, financial, and social needs. It seems that, rather than spelling out specific tasks, the NT allows each congregation to define the role of deacons based on their own needs (e.g., hospitality, visitation of

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<sup>110</sup> The outline in these notes puts a major break (i.e., a Roman numeral) at 15:14. However, this outline is something created for our convenience and not necessarily how Paul would have viewed his letter. In a sense, this “Amen” in v. 33 concludes the discussion in Rom 13:1ff and could even be viewed as parallel to the “Amen” that concludes 11:36. Therefore, you could argue that everything from 12:1–15:33 is a description of what it means to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God in light of his mercy described in Rom 1:18–11:36.

<sup>111</sup> Other early Christians, Clement (he wrote at the end of the first century around the time the NT was being completed) and Ignatius (he wrote in the early second century), also used the word to describe an office in the church.

sick/elderly, building/grounds, meals for those in need, financial stewardship, security, missionary care, etc.). These servants lead by example, being exemplary in doing the types of things that all Christians are called to do, but they are not necessarily overseeing others or teaching others as is required by the elder/pastor. If Phoebe was a recognized deacon in this congregation, it seems that her role included not only acting as a courier but also as a “**helper**” for many, including Paul himself (v. 2 in NASB). The word *helper* could also be translated as *benefactor* (NIV, CSB, NRSV) or *patron* (ESV) and was used for a person with high social standing and wealth who assisted those in need. In the busy port city of Cenchrea, Phoebe likely had many opportunities to assist traveling Christians like Paul.

- However, as the courier who was delivering the letter and likely explaining its contents where the Romans might have had a question regarding Paul’s intentions, Paul could have used the word translated “**benefactor**” with the same meaning that it contained when he used it for Tychichus in Ephesus 6:21 and Colossians 4:7. With this meaning, the word might be translated as a *courier*. Paul is entrusting Phoebe with a great responsibility in not only seeing that the letter arrives but also likely with the expectation that she would be able to answer questions regarding it.
- Whether or not she held what we would call an office in the church, Phoebe had been of great help to many Christians, so Paul asked the Romans to help her with whatever she might need (v. 2). We do not know that much about the roles that different individuals played in the early church (at least I do not). However, as the final list of names makes clear, individuals did play important roles.

## 2. Greetings to Roman Christians (16:3–16)

- Paul includes far more personal greetings than in his other epistles. He likely can do this because he knows fewer people in Rome and can name them all without leaving anyone out.
- Prisca (or “**Priscilla**”)<sup>112</sup> and **Aquila (v. 3)** had helped Paul in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:2–3) and then in Ephesus (cf. Acts 18:19), risking their own lives for him (v. 4), and now have a congregation meeting in their home in Rome (v. 5a) as they did in Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor 16:19). **Epaenetus**, the first convert in Asia (the province of which Ephesus was the chief city), is mentioned alongside them (v. 5b).
- The other believers mentioned in these greetings are only mentioned here in the NT, as far as we know (some of them, like **Mary** in v. 6, have a very common name). However, the names are a mixture of Jewish and Greek or Latin (i.e., Gentile names);

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<sup>112</sup> Paul calls her “Prisca” which was her given name (he does the same in 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19). In the book of Acts, Luke refers to her as “Priscilla” which is the diminutive form of her name. This would be like using Annie for a woman named Ann or using Jennie for a woman named Jennifer. We do not know when Priscilla and Aquilla risked their lives for Paul, but it may have been during the riot in Ephesus described in Acts 19:23–41 (Moo, 936).

see esp. **Hermes** and **Olympas** in vv. 14–15, which refer to pagan mythology).

Twice, Paul mentions his “**kinsmen**” (vv. 7, 11 in NASB), which very likely means the greeted person is Jewish (“**my fellow Jews**” in NIV).

- Besides the congregation in Priscilla and Aquilla’s home, several other congregations are mentioned. For example, those “**of Aristobulus**” (v. 10) and those “**of Narcissus**” (v. 11) (most English versions supply “**household**”) are likely slaves who live in the homes of these two named men (who may not be believers themselves).<sup>113</sup> In verses 14 and 15 (“**with them**”), another two congregations are likely mentioned.
- It is *possible* that the **Aristobulus** in verse 10 is a grandson of Herod the Great, who died in Rome in AD 48 or 49. He is not being greeted (meaning he is not a believer and is possibly dead), but the slaves in his household are greeted. This identification seems supported by verse 11, where a man named **Herodion** is mentioned—a name which likely indicates that he was a freedman serving the family of Herod. In other words, not only is the gospel crossing ethnic lines, but it is also penetrating the households of wealthy individuals.
- In a first-century context, it is striking how many women are named by Paul—Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus’ mother, and Julia.
- Also, notice the emphasis on service for Christ in this section:
  - Mary “**worked very hard for you**” (v. 6)
  - Andronicus and Junia were “fellow prisoners” with Paul (v. 7 in NASB)<sup>114</sup>
  - Urbanus was a “**co-worker**.” (v. 9).
  - Tryphaena and Tryphosa (possibly sisters) were “workers in the Lord” (v. 12)

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<sup>113</sup> After mentioning the slaves in Aristobulus’ home, Paul mentions those in the home of Narcissus. As Moo suggests, “Paul may continue to think of Roman Christians who were socially prominent or who had connections with those who were. For Narcissus is the name of a well-known freedman who served the Emperor Claudius and who committed suicide just before Paul wrote Romans” (941).

<sup>114</sup> Junia is almost certainly a woman’s name (and not “**Junias**” as in the NASB) and she is likely Adronicus’ wife since they are named together. They are also called “apostles.” Paul uses this word to describe those who act as “missionaries” or “messengers” on behalf of the churches. For example, in Phil 2:25 the word is used of Epaphroditus and is usually translated as *messenger*. 2 Cor 8:22 and John 13:16 use the word in a similar way. Therefore, Paul could be saying that this couple functioned as traveling missionaries (Moo, 940; Schreiner, 770). This larger category of “apostles” functioned as representatives of individual churches carrying out various missions for their congregation. This would be different from the specific “apostles” which were a smaller sub-set sent out directly by Christ following his resurrection and who spoke authoritatively as his prophets laying a foundation for his Church (Eph 2:20; 3:5). Another way of interpreting v. 7, which is not as likely, is that the phrase in v. 7 should be translated as “outstanding in the eyes of the apostles” and that Junia and Adronicus are not being called apostles. In either case, they were converted before Paul and their missionary work had led to them being imprisoned at some point. One old tradition says that they were among the 72 sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1.

- Rufus was a “choice man in the Lord” (v. 13 in NASB).<sup>115</sup> This could refer to a specific recognition for service in the Lord, but it also might just be a reference to his election to salvation.
3. A Warning, a Promise, and a Prayer for Grace (16:17–20)
    - After sending greetings to the believers who met in these various congregations in Rome, Paul switches to confront a threat to the unity of these believers.
    - In **verse 17**, he warns about false teachers who are causing disunity by teaching false doctrine. Paul tells the Christians in Rome to (1) keep an eye out for these false teachers and (2) keep away from them. **Verse 18** further explains (“**For**”) the reason for the warning. The Roman Christians have a reputation for obeying correct doctrine, but Paul does not want them to be seduced by those teaching false doctrine (v. 19). Notice that it is the false teachers who are causing disunity (“**those who cause divisions and put obstacles**”). True believers must separate from those teaching false doctrine, but responsibility for this break in unity lies with those who choose to teach doctrine contrary to what the Lord taught through his apostles. It would be wrong to ignore false teaching in the name of preserving Christian unity.
    - Paul ends this small section of his letter by pointing to the promise first announced in Genesis 3:15 that Satan (and his false teachers) will soon be defeated (v. 20a). Then, following this promise, Paul prays for the believers (v. 20b). As in 15:33 Paul refers to God as the “**God of peace.**”
  4. Greetings from Paul’s Companions (16:21–23): Paul sends greetings to the Romans from Christians in Corinth (Timothy, Lucius, Jason<sup>116</sup>, Sosipater<sup>117</sup> among the Jewish believers and Tertius [who is writing the letter], Gaius<sup>118</sup>, Erastus<sup>119</sup>, and Quartus among the Gentiles) to the believers in Rome. The last man, named **Quartus** (a Latin name meaning *fourth*), is someone about whom we know nothing else, but we do know that,

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<sup>115</sup> Since Mark makes a point of telling us that the Simon of Cyrene who carried Christ’s cross was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), some have speculated that Alexander and Rufus were well-known Christians in Rome and perhaps Mark’s Rufus is the same as Paul’s Rufus here in Rom 16:13. We cannot be sure of this because Rufus (and Alexander) were very common names.

<sup>116</sup> This could be the man who helped Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–9).

<sup>117</sup> This is very likely an alternate spelling for Sopater, the man from Berea who accompanied Paul during his trip back to Judea (Acts 20:4).

<sup>118</sup> This is likely the same man who is referred to as a leader in the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 1:14. This was a very common Latin name at the time, so we cannot be sure. It is possible that his full name was Gaius Titus Justus and that he is the Corinthian man named in Acts 18:7. If he is the Titus Justus named in Acts 18:7, the original congregation in Rome may have met in his home. Here in Rom 16:23 it is not clear whether the “whole church” of Corinth still meets in Gaius’ home (which would require a very large house!), or, perhaps more likely, he has shown hospitality to people from the “whole church,” including travelers from other cities.

<sup>119</sup> This is not a very common name, so he is likely the same man named in Acts 19:22 and 2 Tim 4:20. An inscription has been uncovered in Corinth, which is usually dated to the middle of the first century and which refers to an Erastus who was a leading official in the city.

like all followers of Jesus, he is the “**brother**” of Paul and those in Rome. Christians are one spiritual family.

C. Concluding Doxology (16:25–27)

- Moo notes the following connections between Paul’s final doxology and the rest of the epistle, especially its opening (*EBR*, 197):
  - God is “**able to**” — God’s power in 1:4, 16
  - God will “**establish you**” — “to make you strong” in 1:11
  - “**my gospel**” — 1:1, 9, 16; 2:16
  - “**the revelation of the mystery**” — “the righteousness of God is revealed” in 1:17 (cf. 3:21)
  - “**the prophetic writings**” (i.e., the OT) — “through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” in 1:2
  - “**all the Gentiles**” — “all the Gentiles” in 1:5
  - “**obedience that comes from faith**” — “obedience of faith” in 1:5 (cf. 15:18; 16:19)
  - the “**only**” God — Rom 3:29
  - the “**wise**” God — Rom 11:33
- The only God, a wise God, has planned all of history so that he would receive glory through his Son, Jesus the Messiah (v. 27). God receiving the glory that he is rightly due is the best thing for his creation, including his creatures. All of the twists and turns of history, including the salvation of mostly Gentiles today and then the coming salvation of Israel, have been planned by our wise God so that he will achieve the most glory. None of the redeemed in the new heaven and earth will be able to claim that they could have planned it better or that they achieved their place in the renewed world. All the glory will have to go to God through Jesus, who accomplished our salvation. And this glory will last forever!