

Romans 16: Paul's Roman Prayer List...

This chapter contains personal greetings to Christians in Rome, as well as some greetings from Paul's companions in Corinth. Over 30 names are mentioned – and nowhere else in the New Testament do we get such a vivid and detailed picture of the early church, and such a fascinating glimpse into the lives of ordinary first century believers.

Paul may not have met many of the Roman Christians listed here (he had not yet visited Rome), yet he writes to them by name, and with affection – one feels perhaps they formed Paul's Roman prayer list...

Personal greetings (Romans 16 v 1 to 16)

- The name Phoebe (v 1), the feminine form of a title given to the pagan god Apollo, suggests she came from a non-Jewish background, and Cenchreae, the eastern port of Corinth, was not an easy place to live as a Christian. She was now on her way to Rome, perhaps entrusted with this letter. What does Paul tell us about her Christian life and service? What did Paul ask for her from the Christians in Rome and why?
- Priscilla and Aquila (v 3) are mentioned in Acts 18 v 2, 18 and 26 as associates of Paul and helpers of Apollos. Apparently they were now back in Rome.
- The “church in their house” (v 5) – the early church had no buildings: several small congregations would meet in houses, and each probably had its own ‘pastor’.
- Looking through the list of names (v 5 to 16), note the references to (a) hard work and (b) suffering. Note also such personal words as “beloved”, “fellow”, “kinsman”, “brother”, “sister”, “mother” and “family”. What does this tell us about the warmth and ‘family’ feel of this Christian community? How many women are mentioned here?
- Of the 24 names listed in this paragraph, more than half occur in inscriptions or documents connected with the Emperor's palace. We know there were believers among Caesar's household (Philippians 4 v 22), so Paul may be addressing many of the servants of Caesar who had already become Christians.

Final instructions and greetings (Romans 16 v 17 to 23)

- How do we recognise ‘dividers’ and ‘deceivers’ (v 17, 18)? Why are such people so dangerous? What should our attitude be towards them? See also 2 Timothy 2 v 14 to 16.
- What encouragement does Paul give the Roman Christians at this point, and what does he instruct them to do?

“Be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil” (v 19) – this is the best defence. It is far more useful to know what is good (e.g. to understand God's Word), than to become an ‘expert’ in evil things.

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (v 20) – this echoes Genesis 3 v 15. Satan's ultimate defeat of course will not happen until he is bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20 v 1 to 3), but every victory God wins for us now is a preview of that event.

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Doxology (Romans 16 v 25 to 27)

- What do these verses tell us about God?
- What is the “mystery” referred to in v 25?
- What does Paul say about this mystery? See also Ephesians 3 v 3 to 6.
- What is the one all-important goal? By what method is this to be achieved?

Prayer:

Lord, help us to be wise as to what is good, and innocent as to what is evil.

Help us to grow in our knowledge and understanding of your Word.

Thank you for this amazing letter.

Help us to pray for our fellow Christians, for our brothers and sisters and family in Christ – help us to pray as Paul did, with sincere love and affection, in Jesus’ name. Amen.