

TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

We come to Paul's final words to the Romans in the sixteenth chapter. At first glance, one may get the impression that nothing of real value exists here to develop our faith. The first sixteen verses are hardly anything more than several hard-to-pronounce names. However, as we shall see, this chapter is packed with spiritual truths every Christian should know.

Paul is concerned to wrap up his letter announcing he will soon arrive in Rome. He had some loose ends he personally had to take care of before his arrival (cp. 14:25-27). Even more, he wanted to tie up some loose ends for his Roman readers concerning questions his letter undoubtedly raised. Three issues seal the letter Paul wrote to Rome.

Thus, as we begin our final study in Romans, let's follow the outline below:

- I. Let us Commend Humble Dedication (vv. 1-16)**
- II. Let us Correct Harmful Division (vv. 17-20)**
- III. Let us Celebrate Holy Devotion (vv. 21-27)**

I. Let us Commend Humble Dedication (vv. 1-16)

Paul begins the countdown in ending his correspondence to the Romans with a long list of 33 names, 35 individuals, two households, and three churches, summarizing them as "all the saints" (v. 15). For Paul, everyone was significant. No one who loved Jesus did not count. It would be good for modern Christians to take their cue from Paul's example. Too often the church celebrates celebrity instead of humble, loving service for the Lord. For this reason, this section remains all the more significant.

First, Paul mentions the lady courier who took his letter. He writes, "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also" (vv. 1-2). According to Paul, Phebe was a bright, radiant Christian woman with a decidedly servant's heart. He felt he needed to "commend" her to Rome, since she was the bearer of the letter.

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Paul's action here mystifies those critics today who insist the Apostle Paul looked down on women. Nevertheless, his "commending" her to the Romans proves exactly the opposite. In the commendation, Paul uses three terms we must examine. First, he refers to Phebe as "our sister." This is her *position* in the church, having no implication to natural kinship but only spiritual. Because her life had been changed through believing the Gospel, Christ had entered her heart through faith. Consequently, she was adopted in the family of God. And, because she was now their sister in the faith, Paul exhorts the Romans to "receive her in the Lord."



Reflection Connection

Since every member of the church should be busily serving, how is the church responsible to support each member's ministry? To whom is the servant responsible? Explain.

A second term Paul used of Phebe is “servant,” referring to her *place* in the church. Note also her being a servant “of” the church is indicative of her submission to the church’s authority.

Interestingly, the word which translates “servant” is the same word which translates “deacon” elsewhere. Some think this passage not only supports women as deacons, but many have also used it to support women as pastors. While there is no doubt the New Testament rocked the ancient world with its clear liberation of women—women were disciples of Jesus and were the last at the cross and first to see Him resurrected—Paul’s use of “servant” here does not lend itself to being translated as “deacon.” Unless, of course, one is thinking of deacon in the broadest sense possible—which is *service*. In other words, Paul is stressing Phebe’s place of ministering, not an official title. Paul’s admonition to the Romans was to “assist her.”

The final term Paul uses of Phebe is “succourer,” a term denoting her *performance* in the church. This particular term was used of “patrons,” Citizens in Athens who took charge of travelers who possessed no rights. Here, Phebe’s humble dedication to caring and providing is obviously in view. What a blessing Phebe was to the church!

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Another example of humble, dedicated service to the Lord Paul gives is, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus” (v. 3). This couple was Paul’s “helper” in Kingdom work. We recall their unusual abilities, especially in teaching Scripture. They were the ones who instructed Apollos in the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24-28). Now the apostle is not only commending them for their courage (v. 4), but also the church they started in their home (v. 5).

Then, Paul puts together a litany of names of those who serve the church, as it were, anonymously, never gaining the popularity as do many others (vv. 5b-16). When we all stand before Christ, some of the greatest rewards will be given, not to those famous Christians you know, but to those names you have never even heard.

II. Let us Correct Harmful Division (vv. 17-20)

Moving from the list of saints Paul compiled, he feels the need to deal with some unhealthy conflict which he suspects. He writes, “...mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ...[but] deceive the hearts of the simple...I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly...” (vv. 17-20).

No church is immune from division. Jesus Himself predicted there would be strife, division, and schism to overcome (Matt. 7:15). Paul knew well troublemakers among God’s people existed and spoke openly about it to them.



First, he announces a caution about harmful division (vv. 17-18). Our first step, then is to *analyze* the troublemakers. This is what Paul means when he says “mark them.” The word Paul uses means “to fix one’s eyes upon.” In other words, we must note the divisive persons and keep them under surveillance. How do we do this? Not by hiring private detectives obviously. Instead, Paul is concerned about their “dissensions” contrary to “doctrine.” False teaching in the church is a major concern. The entire body will be infected with the poison if it is not checked.

Once the troublemakers are *analyzed*, Paul insists troublemakers be *avoided*. The word Paul uses for “avoid” means “to bow out,” “to keep or stay away from” (cp. 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10). The apostle is insisting we not engage in fruitless discussions concerning which the devil is a master (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16; Gen.3:1-6).

Reflection Connection

Since believers are cautioned to both analyze and avoid harmful troublemakers in the church, even refusing to have discussions with them, how does the church continue to minister to them? Should the church discipline them by severing their membership? Why or why not?

Second, he asserts a challenge about harmful division. Paul wrote, “For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (v. 19). The best antidote for harmful division is the example of genuine, spirit-filled Christian living. As Paul puts it, it’s all about “obedience.” No greater compliment could be offered a follower of Christ than the life he or she is living looks a lot like Jesus.

In addition, our obedience to the Gospel life is to be not only *competent*, as Paul expresses in “wise” and “good” living, but also *innocent* as expressed in being “simple concerning evil.” Here Paul insists one need not try evil in order to be wise to evil. The world says, “try it and you might like it,” the tacit assumption being one must experience something before refusing something. Such a false philosophy is but a satanic trick. It is far better to be naive when it comes to sin.

Third, he assures a conquest over harmful division (v. 20). Christians do not have to fail in dealing with harmful division in the church. In fact, Paul insists we may have *continual* conquest, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (v. 20a). Our Lord promises full success in dealing with troublemakers in God’s church.

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III. Let us Celebrate Holy Devotion (vv. 21-27)

Before sending the letter to Rome, Paul issues a final greeting to his friends, “saluting” them (v. 21). Among those on the list are some notable men. Timothy was Paul’s right hand man in ministry. Every Christian needs someone to mentor in the faith. Another one Paul mentions is Tertius (v. 22). He actually served as Paul’s *amanuensis*, very common in the ancient world (cp. Jer. 36:32). The term “*amanuensis*” is a Latin term meaning “one who takes dictation.” Tertius was Paul’s personal secretary. Incidentally, the fact that Paul used an *amanuensis* helps us better understand the visible differences in style between Paul’s letters.



Reflection Connection

What can you or your study group do to have a hospitality event to promote an infrastructure of relationships? What is necessary to make sure the event you do does not end with being a social gathering, but assures non-believers who attend will have the Gospel shared with them? Explain.

Gaius is one whom Paul salutes (v. 23). An entire church was housed in his home. Hence, Gaius' gift was obviously hospitality. The church needs those who possess this gift. Hosting events is an effective means by which to present the Gospel to people. Not that the event itself has to have an official time of proclamation. Instead, an infrastructure of relationships are built during these events which lead to sharing the Gospel with non-believers.

After Paul's greeting, he repeats an idea interwoven throughout the entire letter to Rome—*grace*. He writes, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (v. 24). Note Paul cannot speak about grace without thinking of Jesus Christ being the greatest revelation of grace (cp. 2 Cor.8:9; John 1:17). The grace to which Paul refers is *sovereign* grace. The salvation we possess is, without qualification, all from God. We never sought God (3:11). Instead it is always God seeking us.

In addition, the *sovereign* grace to which Paul appeals is *saving* grace. The Lord Jesus came to save us from sin (Matt. 1:21.). No other can or could save us (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ is the only remedy for sin's disease (cp. John 14:6). Finally, the grace so sovereign and saving, fully *satisfies* the thirsty human heart. Jesus the "Christ," God's Anointed Messiah, is our great Prophet, Priest, and King. Every need we have is fully met in Jesus.

Nevertheless, while grace has been fully *revealed* in Jesus Christ our Lord, it must also be fully *received* in every human life. Christ died *sufficiently* for all peoples. In other words, nothing need be added to the death of Jesus to procure salvation for one single soul. When Jesus said, "It is finished!," He meant it is finished! No sacrifice is further necessary to satisfy God's demand of just punishment for sins (cp. 1 John 2:2). However, the only way to connect to the life Jesus gives through His death is to receive it by faith (Eph. 2:8-10; 1Tim. 4:10; Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

Paul began Romans declaring Jesus Christ, "to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (v. 4). He closes his letter no less with a doxology, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ...according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen" (vv. 25-27). An outburst of praise consumed the apostle. He celebrated Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord through holy devotion. The "power of God" is so great, He is able to save us to the uttermost (cp. Heb. 7:25). And, this "mystery" from the Old Testament is now made plain to us in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

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But not only to us. The Gospel we celebrate is a Gospel “made known to all nations” by the continued witness of the church. Therefore, as we go to all nations, carrying out **the** great commission of our Lord, we do so for “the obedience of faith,” which brings honor and “glory through Jesus Christ for ever.”

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul introduces Phebe to the Romans with the word “commend” (v. 1). The Greek term “*synistemi*” literally means “coming together.” We get our English term “synthesis” from this Greek root. Paul was introducing Phebe to the Romans, exhorting them to spiritually bond together with her as she is a sister in the faith. The essence of church membership for all Christians is this “coming together.” Paul reminds Christians of their duty when a believer transfers membership from another church to theirs. No less than a fresh “coming together,” a bonding together is acceptable.

Wrap Up

The Gospel is no less the power of God unto salvation now. The Christian church must busily be about doing what Jesus counts most significant. And what does Christ count most significant? Taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth, never being deterred from this primary mission by listening to troublemakers who would thwart the mission. Such troublemakers are harmfully divisive to the church fellowship. Thus we deal lovingly but swiftly with them, keeping our eyes fixed on our Lord Who one day soon will come for His bride, the church. Marathana. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

