

## “COMM-UNITY” *Romans 16*

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wis  
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*1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. 3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow*

*workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you. 17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. 20 And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. 21 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. 22 I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. 25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*



*“Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world...” Romans 1:8*

We began the study of this book with the declaration that it has been called by many the “Christian Manifesto.” The book of Romans is arguably the greatest Biblical work that we have been given, for there is no greater explanation of the gospel and the doctrines which make up the Christian faith. We have in this study covered the doctrines of justification, sanctification, divine election, condemnation, the perseverance of the saints, total depravity, the last judgment, the fall of man, the revelation of God in nature, the final restoration of the Jews, and so much more.

Romans was written to a church community that Paul had yet to physically visit. It was a community of believers that birthed a fellowship through spiritual hunger and a desire for truth and unity. Many believe that its founding members were in the crowd in Jerusalem that illustrious day in which the Holy Spirit, the “comforter” arrived and came upon those in the upper room. That epic day when Peter stepped out and delivered the simple gospel message which brought 3,000 to salvation! It’s almost certain that out of those

3,000 souls were those from Rome who took the Spirit back with them and the church was birthed spontaneously from their midst.

It is generally understood that Paul penned this letter from the city of Corinth. The irony is not lost in the fact that the book of Romans, *which embraces the grace of God*, was written from that famously wicked city. Corinth was a place and a time in which every sin and vice was embraced and even celebrated! It was the Los Angeles, the Amsterdam or the Las Vegas of the ancient world. And yet in the midst of all that profound evil, Paul did not write a scathing letter laying down detailed rules and demands of obedience! Instead he wrote of God's *grace!* The "*free unearned favor and love of God.*" It is sad admonition that a vast segment of the church went on to effectively write what Paul would not: an "alternative path" to God's grace, the road of corporate legalism, and an attempt to earn favor through the "law."

This does not mean Paul did not value holiness and discipline; rather, he understood that the path to such was not the road of legalism...for that was the way of the Judaizers. It was only by embracing the loving patient grace of God that one can ever know that intimate relationship with God! To understand this letter, we must note that it was not an evangelical letter, but rather one of instruction and clarification for believers that were seeking the "how" as well as the "what." For in the heart of every man was and still is the ultimate question: "*How can a man be right with God?*"

It has been said that only by knowing Christ personally can one truly *be* a Christian. You can be a Buddhist and never know Buddha. You can be a Muslim without ever knowing Mohammed, and the list goes on. But you cannot be a Christian without knowing Christ. And not just knowing *of* Him or *about* Him, but actually intimately and experientially knowing Him and further, *Him knowing you.*

This book profoundly and eternally altered the course of the likes of Martin Luther, Augustine, Calvin, and Wesley, *and for so many others who have followed.* And it has manifested itself in the birth and growth of this fellowship...this community that we find ourselves in today. We mentioned at as we began this letter that it was clear that everyone in that church in Rome was participating...each taking their place in the community to form a truly transformative community of individuals. Romans was written to "all of you" in the church in Rome. He thanked God for "all of them." But it was for those who were actually *IN* that church...not those who simply *attended.*

Paul...when he was still Saul of Tarsus, had gained fame far and wide for persecuting the church...arresting and sometimes even killing the pastors that he found. But like many of us that have followed, God inexplicably reached down and plucked Paul from the pack with nothing more than the sentiment of "I want *you*..." And of those of us that have been so selected...if we come to that understanding...a "clarity" of who and what we are...a humility in the mandate of unity... other-centered love for my brethren as well as for my God, we are privileged to participate in *moving...in changing...* the world! Every one of the chosen apostles were men cut from that same bolt of cloth. The world wouldn't have bet a dime on any of them, and yet they altered the course of history.

And we here in this fellowship...just like those in Rome...have been flung into the each other's lives...our destinies now intertwined. We have corporately and personally had the opportunity to be a part of something that will, God willing, outlive us all. Such a unity and group participation would have been a rarity even in Paul's day. Perhaps that is why we don't have too many letters addressed like this one. But however scarce such a dynamic was in that day, it would pale in comparative rarity to the day in which we live.

Paul began this letter by clarifying his position...his part in it all. The letter does not begin with reverend Paul. Not bishop, evangelist, apostle, or even “Christian” Paul! He begins with a clarity and understanding of himself in the grand spiritual scheme of things. Paul was not a youngster at this point in ministry. If ever he thought himself to be anything at all, he was over that now. The miles of life have a way of doing that to a man. Paul referred to himself as a *doulos*, a “bond-slave” of Jesus Christ. He was just a servant to Christ and to his brethren. He knew there was no way to fly solo as a Christian. And certainly not if one desired to affect the world around him or her. No one does that alone. To live out this faith, we must at some point come to the clarity that there is no “me.” There is only “us” now.

Certainly it all hasn’t come without blood. Through the years there have been those who come amongst us that knew only one priority and that is themselves and themselves alone. Paul and the early churches experienced this also and they sometimes named names: Hymenaeus and Alexander, Philetus, Demus...the “hall of Shame” recorded in the bestselling book in history. Of course these folks eventually moved on...sometimes after one Sunday, sometimes after years and even decades. They didn’t love us. They loved only themselves. They were not part of us. Some departed after years of attending here, left in a moment without even a good bye or a thank you, and now they have been relegated to spiritual obscurity. The moment passed...the day was lost. This is the ground in which we, like others, are birthing Christian communities in today.

God has chosen to use men and women...*our* hands and feet...*our* voices, for the furthering of His kingdom. He needn’t use us. He could have “called ten thousand angels.” But He has chosen to use us. With all our failures and shortcomings...all our selfishness and our frail egos. But let us know this: *we are traveling this road together*. We “live together, or we die alone.”

**16:1-2 – “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God’s people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me.”**

We must remember that it was at the hands of Christ that women were given liberty and status. In that day women were considered merely property and had little if any rights and value short of cook, maid, and baby-maker. It was Christianity that gave women the worth that God had ordained.

Phoebe served her Christian mission in Cenchrea, a port town of Corinth. She had travelled to Rome where one of her tasks was to deliver Paul’s letter. Paul introduces her to the Romans in terms of her ministry. For Phoebe was a “servant”: *deacon* in the original language. Thus we can gather that the role of deaconess *was* and *is* a scriptural directive. In Christ, women are being called to take their God ordained place in the body of Christ. Sadly, we have instead an often preoccupation with what positions and rolls God has *not* ordained for woman, instead of focusing on what God *has* ordained. Such is birthed from the self-centered entitlement that runs like a river through our culture today, and inevitably finds its way into the greater church. Lost is the unity and community that Christ wanted and that Paul taught...

As we come to the close of Romans, after Paul had spoken so in depth about unity and community, he does what he often did, *he named names*. For this mission was real for Paul. Real ministry with real people. Some shined, and some failed. Such is the reality of serving the kingdom of God.

**16:3-5a – Priscilla and Aquila...“Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to**

**them, and so are all the Gentile churches. Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.”**

Here we have the names, (and again, Paul named names in good light and bad!), of a couple of saints that always seemed to be there for Paul and the Kingdom of God. Prisca and Aquila were a married couple. They were friends of Paul, and the three had lived, worked, travelled and ministered together. Again...let's notice that whenever Aquila's name was mentioned, his wife's was right there too. *THIS* is the design of God, ministering side by side as one flesh before God.

Moreover, it seemed that Priscilla and Aquila were actually Paul's friends. It's hard to be the friends of such men like Paul. It can be quite personally expensive. For with guys like him, faithfulness is critical and when it fails it can be devastating to them...

**16:5b - Epäenetüs (*Ee – peeny-tus*)... “Greet my dear friend Epenetus. He was the first person from the province of Asia to become a follower of Christ.”**

This is the only Bible verse that mentions Epäenetüs. He too was a friend (literally, “beloved”) of Paul, but we know nothing about him apart from Paul's claim that he was the first person in Asia Minor who became a Christian.

**16:6 - Mary ... “Give my greetings to Mary, who has worked so hard for your benefit.”**

Paul uses “labor/laborer” words for ministry and ministers in a few of his letters.

**16:7 – Andronicus (*Andro-ni-cus*) and Junia (*June-ee-a*)... “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews, who were in prison with me. They are highly respected among the apostles and became followers of Christ before I did.”**

Andronicus and Junia were a missionary couple who had been persecuted for their faith. They had been Christians longer than Paul, perhaps they had even been disciples when Jesus was alive. The couple is described in terms of their relationship with Paul (and other apostles) and their ministry.

**16:8 – Ampliatus (*am-plea-atus*) ... “Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.”**

Ampliatus was a common male name, especially of slaves in the imperial household, but we know nothing about this man except that he was also a friend (“beloved”) of Paul.

**16:9 - Urbanus (*Ur-bane-us*) and Stachys (*Stake-us*) ... “Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.”**

Just like Prisca and Aquila, Urbanus, a man, is described using Paul's favorite word for a fellow minister: “*coworker*.” Stachys is the third person in this list who Paul describes as his friend (“beloved”).

**16:10 – Apelles (*A-pell-ease*) and Aristobulus (*Air-a-stop-o-less*)... “Greet Apelles, a good man whom Christ approves. And give my greetings to the believers from the household of Aristobulus.”**

Another scriptural version says Apelles was tried and true in Christ. Apparently he was a man whose faith in Christ had been tested in some way, and proven. I don't know that you can really know where your heart is until you have been so tested. Literally "those from/of Aristobulus" probably refers to the family and/or the slaves of a man named Aristobulus. It may also refer to a congregation (or, house church) hosted by Aristobulus, but it is odd that Aristobulus himself is not explicitly greeted. The name Aristobulus was a Greek name that the family of Herod the Great used. Some have suggested that this Aristobulus was the grandson of Herod the Great and the brother of Agrippa 1.

**16:11 – Herodion (*Her-row-dee-an*) and Narcissus (*Nar-ciss-us*)... “Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet the Lord’s people from the household of Narcissus.”**

Paul makes a point of highlighting the ethnicity of some of his fellow Jews. This is significant as there were tensions between the Jews and Gentiles in the Roman Church at the time Paul wrote his letter. Literally “those from/of Narcissus.” Narcissus is a male name, and like Aristobulus, he may have been the host of a house church, or it may only have been family members and/or his slaves who belonged to the church.

**16:12 – Tryphena (*Tre-fena*) and Tryphosa (*Tre-foe-sa*) and Persis (*Per-sis*) ... “Give my greetings to Tryphena and Tryphosa, the Lord’s workers, and to dear Persis, who has worked so hard for the Lord.**

These first two women, most likely sisters or even twins, ministered “in the Lord.” Despite the sense of daintiness and of luxurious living that the etymology of their names conveys, these women apparently were hard workers. Paul also refers to Persis, a woman, as a dear friend (“beloved”). The apostle regarded all these three with warm affection, but in this greeting Paul speaks even higher of Persis. Persis was not just loved by Paul, she was also loved by the church. Furthermore, Paul refers to the ministry of Persis, something that was apparently well known about her. Seven women have been mentioned so far, including Phoebe, and Paul has said something about the ministries of each of these women.

**16:13-16 – “Greet Rufus, (*Ru-fas*) whom the Lord picked out to be his very own; and also his dear mother, who has been a mother to me. Give my greetings to Asyncritus, (*A-sin-cree-tus*) Phlegon, (*Flay-gan*) Hermes, (*Her-mees*) Patrobas, (*Pa-tro-bus*) Hermas, (*Her-maas*) and the brothers and sisters who meet with them. Give my greetings to Philologus, (*Fil-low-gus*) Julia, Nereus (*Near-ree-us*) and his sister, and to Olympas (*O-limp-us*) and all the believers who meet with them. Greet each other in Christian love. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.”**

Some have also suggested that this “Rufus” is the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross of Christ in Mark 15:21.

**16:17-18 – “And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people’s faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people.”**

We must acknowledge that the enemy will stop at nothing to strain the harmony of the body of Christ.

We need to realize that we live in a corrupt and depraved world. That means that some people will become disgruntled, disappointed, unhappy, selfish, sinful, and in some cases outright evil. Let us read this passage and know it well. These are God's words. "Watch out for divisive people and avoid them..." The direction is clear and without argument. The only question is whether we will obey. These folks, *if given opportunity*, will deceive the hearts of the *simple*. The "simple" are their targets...the child-like and immature.

*"The most effective way for Satan to get a foothold into a strong church is to quietly and insidiously move a divisive person into some teaching or position where he can influence immature believers. Paul knew this, so he left the warning until the end of his letter. It is a warning that must be heeded by a strong church if it is to keep its witness for the Lord."* (Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible Commentary)

**16:19-20 - But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to be wise in doing right and to stay innocent of any wrong. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.**

This church had chosen to *obey*. This is the greatest thing that can be said about a body of believers! For if there is *obedience* then there is all of the rest of the gifts and the miraculous present! Paul wants us...*God wants us*, to be "wise in doing right." We are expected to use our heads. Nothing is mentioned here about using our emotions on these matters.

The place where we are to be "innocent" or "simple" is concerning evil. What does that mean? The world has a lot to say about "shades of gray" when it comes to good and bad. Most often it is arbitrary and situational in nature. The arguments are circular and opinion based with no absolutes. In other words, the world's ideas concerning evil are anything but simple!

**16:21-26 - Timothy, my fellow worker, sends you his greetings, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (*So-see-pater*), my fellow Jews. I, Tertius (*Tur-she-us*), the one writing this letter for Paul, send my greetings, too, as one of the Lord's followers. Gaius says hello to you. He is my host and also serves as host to the whole church. Erastus, the city treasurer, sends you his greetings, and so does our brother Quartus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him.**

God is *able* to "make you strong" or "establish" you. This happens "... according to (the) gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." The key is the teaching of Christ, the *gospel* of Jesus Christ. Paul's desire throughout this letter was to "establish" in Christ those in the church in Rome.

The word *establish* means to make stable, place firmly, set fast, fix to strengthen, make firm, to render constant, to confirm one's mind. In an age of believers being blown around by "every wind of doctrine," and every emotional breeze, such a concept as "stability" seems almost alien to us.

**16:27 - All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.**

And Paul gives a fourth and final *amen*. *Ahh...*a preacher to the end.

What a list of names! It must have been a great church...recorded here all these years later for us to read. I wonder if they will remember us?