

Couldn't Do It Without You

The greatest letter ever written is The Epistle to the Romans, by the Apostle Paul. Unfortunately, many folks enjoy the first 15 chapters of the letter and overlook the last chapter, which is rich with wisdom for today's Church. Let's take a look:

Romans 16:1-27

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

¹⁷ I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. ¹⁹ For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

²¹ Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

²² I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.

²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The first thing we learn from this chapter is:

I. The Gospel Mission demands Gospel Partnership. (16:1-16, 21-23)

As great a leader the Apostle Paul was, he could never carry out the Great Commission without a vast array of committed partners. As he confronted the challenges of a large, powerful, and corrupt city, he thoughtfully networked with many fellow workers. We see that strategy here in his approach to ministry in Rome. We should take note of two primary aspects of his ministry partners:

1) They were diverse—in socio-economic background (slave and free), in religious background (Jew and Gentile), in spiritual gifting, and in gender. Paul, in his own day, was radically pro-female. Out of the twenty-six people mentioned in Rome (vv.1-16), nine of them are women, who were very influential and extremely helpful.

2) They were united. There are several things that can unite partners (usually it's our mutual self-interest) but in this case, the primary uniting factor is none other than Christ Himself. Four times in this chapter Paul says "in Christ"; five times he says "in the Lord"; four times he calls various ones "my beloved"; and in verses one and 17, he calls the saints "brother" and "sister." The Church is not just a ministry partnership, but a family.

From this chapter, we also learn:

II. Gospel Partnership will be threatened with disunity. (16:17-19)

Anytime God's people are doing His work, they will be opposed by God's enemy, Satan himself. Here we are commanded to do three things:

- 1) Watch out. Don't be surprised. There are people under the influence of Satan who want to destroy everything you are doing for God. Sometimes they stir up dissension, sometimes they attack the leadership, but here Paul says they divide the Church by teaching heresy.
- 2) Avoid them. Churches, ministries, and families that are not disciplined will be torn apart by the evil one. Take a look at I Corinthians 5:11 and Titus 3:10 for additional instructions in such circumstances.
- 3) Be wise. It is our duty to be discerning about truth and error, good and evil.

III. The Gospel Partnership will one day triumph. (16:20, 25-27)

- 1) God will crush Satan, and He will do so under our feet! The one who has been opposing you and undermining you and frustrating you with his wicked ways will one day be completely vanquished. Hallelujah!
- 2) The Gospel will glorify God by strengthening all of His people and by bringing those of every nation to the obedience of faith.

No matter what we are suffering now, we will soon experience the mighty victory that God promises His dear people.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it encouraging for us to observe the vast diversity among the saints in Rome? How are we challenged by that diversity in our own churches today?
2. What can we do to capitalize more fully on the unity God has given us in Christ?
3. How does the devil today most often seek to divide Christ's Church? What's the solution?

4. In Jesus' earthly ministry, what hints do we have that He has come to fulfill God's promise in Genesis 3:15b? Why does Revelation 20:7-10 make you glad?

5. How does obedience to the Great Commission glorify God?

Going Deeper

What is your place in Christ's ministry to Memphis?

How can you do a better job of partnering with other brothers and sisters in Memphis to advance the Kingdom of God?