

Romans: Comment and Commentary

“Therefore, accept one another,  
just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God (15:7).”

Parenthesis: This verse seems to summarize the book.

“Accept one another:” the purpose of the book (12-15)

“Just as Christ accepted us:” the foundation of the exhortation (1-11)

- I. Prologue, 1:1-17
- II. The Universality of Human Sinfulness, 1:18-3:20
- III. The Universality of Divine Righteousness for the Jew and Gentile: Justification, 3:21-4:25
- IV. The Assurance of God’s Righteousness: Sanctification
- V. The Vindication of God’s Righteousness: His Promises to Israel, 9:1-11:36
- VI. The Daily Application of God’s Righteousness: The Believer’s Walk, 12:1-15:13
- VII. Epilogue, 15:14-16:27

A. Personal Explanations, 15:14-33

B. Personal Greetings, 16:1-16

In many ways this chapter is often passed over rather quickly in that it does not carry forward Paul’s argument that ended in 15:13 with the first of several benedictions. As Newell has commented, “This sixteenth chapter is neglected by many to their own loss. It is by far the most extensive, intimate, and particular of all the words of loving greeting in Paul’s marvelous letters. No one can afford to miss this wonderful outpouring of the heart of our apostle toward the saints whom he so loved—which means all the real Church of God!” Important for us the chapter is full of personal insights that reveal much about Paul and his ministry. Paul developed deep friendships; he did not live an isolated life. He needed friends and cultivated many through his labors.

- 1. The commendation of Phoebe, vv. 1-2

It seems likely that Phoebe carried Paul’s letter to Rome, perhaps she may have had business matters in the city. The word for business (*pargma*) can mean a lawsuit as it does in 1 Cor. 6:1. She is described three ways: first, “our sister;” second, as a servant (*diakonos*, *Phil 1:1*) in the church at Cenchrea (here is an early indication that women may have served as deaconesses), Corinth’s seaport to the East; and third, “great help,” which can mean patroness or benefactress. She was evidently a woman of means who used her resources to support the church in her city, and the apostle. She was not a Jewess but of pagan heritage since her name is one of the designations for the goddess Diana.

In the first century letters of recommendation were common as a security measure.

- 2. The salutations of Paul, vv. 3-16

Paul mentions twenty-four individuals by name and two others whom he does not name (v. 13, Rufus' mother and v. 15 Nereus' sister). Paul's greetings suggest that the churches in Rome were diverse in race, social standing, and gender. Of the 26, eleven are women and fifteen are men. Some of the names reflect a Roman heritage, the majority Greek.

- a. Heading the list of people (v. 3) Paul greets in Rome are Priscilla and Aquila. Paul spent three years in Ephesus where he met Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila who had fled from Rome to Corinth because of persecution [Acts 18:1-3], had a church in their home (I Cor. 16:19), and there met Paul on the second of his journeys. We find them also in Ephesus where they encountered Apollos (Acts 18:24-28) and established a gathering of believers (v. 5). Of the six occurrences of this couple in the Bible, Priscilla is named first, likely because of her higher status. Their profession was that of tent-making and Paul joined them. They subsequently returned to Rome after Claudius' rampage.
- b. Several of the people (Ampliatius [v.8], Urbanus [v.9], Hermes [v.14], Philologus and Julia [v. 15]) have names common for slaves, though they could have been former slaves. Two, Tertius and Quartus, appear to be a slave since they are identified only by a number (third and fourth).
- c. Several of the people came from the upper ranks of Roman society. Aristobulus, "a man of victory" [v. 10] was likely a grandson of Herod the Great and friend of Emperor Claudius. Narcissus [v. 11] was also an influence on Claudius' life. There is evidence that Priscilla was as well.
- d. Rufus [v. 13] and Alexander were sons of Simon the Cyrene, the man that was conscripted to carry Jesus' cross. Mark wrote his gospel from Rome and is the only one to mention Simon's son (15:21).
- e. Perhaps eleven of the twenty-six persons mentioned are women (Priscilla [v. 3]; Mary, a Jew [v. 6]; Junia [v. 7]; Tryphena, Typhossa (Delicate) (v. 12), and Persis [v. 12]; Rufus' mother [v. 13]; Julia, and Nereus' sister [v. 15]. Four of these he singles out as working hard (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis).
- f. Two couples in the list are particularly singled out, Priscilla with Aquila [v.3] and Andronicus with Junia [v. 7]. Priscilla is listed before her husband probably because she was from a higher social stratum or because she was dominant in the twosome. If Junia is a feminine form, it is likely that Andronicus and Junia were a married couple. Both couples served the Lord at great sacrifice for and with Paul.
- g. From the list we have a hint that the progress of the gospel-witness often was at great personal cost and amid significant danger: Priscilla and Aquila (v. 1), Andronicus and Junia (v. 7), and Apelles (v. 10).
- h. There were several house churches in Rome: Priscilla and Aquila's (v. 5), Asyncritus' (v. 14), and Philologus' (v. 15). There is no evidence of a single assembly in the city, nor documentation of a single leader over the churches.
- i. There were no fixed edifices for worship until the third century. As one has said, "What a relief, not to be bothered with a church building program!"

- ij. There seems to be an emphasis on unity in the church, a unity in their common Lord. Perhaps an antidote to the central problem the precipitated the writing. About ten times the expressions “in the Lord,” “in Christ,” and variations are found.
  - k. The saints in the church seemed to exhibit a great deal of humility since their giftedness was in the helping gifts, not leading gifts (12:6-8). Several in the greetings-list are specifically commended for their arduous labors (vv. 6, 12).
  - l. Interestingly, there are no references to any pastors in the churches, certainly not a bishop. Lay leaders directed the house churches, a plurality of men. There are no greetings indicating a clergy class.
  - m. The reference to Andronicus and Junia (v. 7) as “apostles” gives credence to the fact that “apostle” means a “sent one,” a missionary as well as one of the twelve.
  - n. “The kiss of peace” (v. 16) is an eastern custom of salutation just as hand shaking is in the West. It continues in the Orthodox Churches as part of their liturgy. Men greeted men with a kiss, women the women.
  - n. Some of the names have interesting me: Epäentus (“praised”), v. 6, Paul’s first convert in Asia; Urbanus (“City dweller”), v. 9; Stacys (“ear of grain”), v. 8; Tryphosa (“dainty”), v. 12; Tryphosa (“delicate”), v. 12; Persis (“Persian woman”), v. 12; Rufus (“red” or “red-headed”), v. 13; Hermes (“god of good luck”), v. 14; Philologus (“fond of words”), v. 15.
  - p. It is interesting that ten or eleven in the list of Paul’s fellow-workers were women: Phoebe (v. 1), Prisca (v. 3), Mary (v. 6), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (v. 12), Persis (v. 12), Julia (v. 15), an unnamed mother (v.13), and an unnamed sister (v. 15).
- C. Final thoughts, vv. 17-20
- John Stott summarizes Paul’s concluding threefold appeal this way: to vigilance, to separation, and to discernment.
1. Paul’s command: avoid false teachers, v. 17  
The apostle does not suggest the presence of a particularly threatening group so it may seem best to see the warning in general terms. False teachers often come with flattery and eloquence; pleasantries without substance should be a blinking light. Particularly susceptible to deception are immature, naive believers.
  2. Paul’s defense of the admonition, v. 18  
The doctrinally factitious are to be shunned as those operating with malicious intent for personal gain. The church simply cannot tolerate falsity at either a moral or a theological level; it destroys the health of the church.
  3. Paul’s confidence in the Romans, v. 19  
The “for” indicates the reason for Paul’s confidence that the Romans will recognize and resist false teachers.
  4. Paul’s confidence in God, v. 20a  
Though obvious, the apostle believed in destructive, negative supernatural forces in this world, the demonic, under the direction and empowered by Satan. He did not see him as a kind of satirical guy in a red outfit with long ears, a pitchfork in hand scampering about. He is the cause of all the evil in our world; he is very powerful but

tethered by the almighty power of God. Is the immanent doom of Satan eschatological or is it reflected confidence that the Roman church will resist false teachings in the assemblies? It is both, one a shadowed fulfillment of the ultimate final one!

5. Paul's benediction, v. 20b

D. Personal Salutation of Paul's Companions, vv. 21-24

Verse 24 is probably not genuine, being a repetition of verse 20. Eight friends of Paul send their greeting to the churches; they seem to be fellow missionaries. These people were with him in Corinth.

1. Paul's co-laborers are four: Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (Sopater). Timothy extensively traveled with Paul; he was from Derbe (Acts 20:4). He had considerable ministry in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19) traveling with the apostle on his missionary tours in Macedonia. Jason may have been Paul's landlord in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5ff); Sopater may have been from the Berean church; he accompanied the apostle to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) with the financial gift.
2. Tertius was probably a slave; his name means "third." Slaves were not given names, only numbers. Quartus, "fourth," was probably his brother. Hermes was a common slave name (v. 14).
3. Gaius' full name was probably Gaius Titius Justus, the man who gave Paul hospitality after he was expelled from the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:7).
4. Erastus was the commissioner of public works in Corinth. An inscription bears his name in the city as a treasurer.

E. Benediction, vv. 25-27

This paragraph is a characteristic benediction of the apostle; it is the longest of his doxologies. It contains a large interlude (v. 25b-26). The benediction reads, "Now to him who can establish you ... [the] only wise God through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Amen."

1. The God who establishes his people, v. 25 a
2. An interlude: The mystery concerning the Gentiles, vv. 25b-26
  - a. The means of it, v. 25b  
"According," indicates the means of maturing the saints in Rome, the preaching of the gospel as expressed in the grand disclosure of God's intent to bring Gentiles into blessings through and with the Jews.
  - b. The hiddenness of it, v. 25c  
A "mystery" is a truth that is only known through revelation. It concerns the inclusion of Gentiles into the family of God (Rom. 11), the body of Christ.
  - c. The manifestation of it, v. 26a  
The "mystery" of Jew/Gentile equality was revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Again, this theme of Jew/Gentile parity is a theme often trumpeted by the apostle. It must have been hard for both groups, having experienced centuries of mutual denigration one of the other, to see them now as one in Christ, the great "mystery" now disclosed.
  - d. The disclosure of it, v. 26b
3. God who is alone wise and glorious, v. 27

- a. The wisdom of God, v.27a  
The doxology began by extolling God's power; it ends with God's wisdom. God's wisdom is revealed through Christ (John 1:14).
- b. The means of it: through Jesus Christ, v. 27b
- c. The purpose: the eternal glory of God, v. 27c

#### Applications:

1. It should be expected that obstacles be placed in the path of those who seek to serve God. Paul would spend two years imprisoned in Caesarea and two more in Rome before he was released and could minister in the far reaches of the empire to the West. What we can learn is that God has plans that we may not understand, but we must believe that they are better than ours. Think of how many he contacted in those four years. Do you trust that God's plans are best even when you do not understand the ways of God? What does this tell us about obedience?
2. No matter what our circumstances, we can take comfort that God's archenemy will soon be crushed. We live in a world where it seems that wrong prevails over right, destruction over comfort often. It could be reasonable to conclude that the great enemies of our soul (sin and death), has and will always have the final word. We must never allow this to be the drift of our thought-life, usually amid pain and suffering. Evil exists, Satan is active, but his fierceness will be quelled as Luther said in "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," "one little word shall fell him." We wait in hope not only for our Lord to deliver us, but for the day when Christ will crush the "serpent." Do you find yourself depressed by the events swirling around you or do you live in hope and assurance that God will have the last say and His perfect, divine counsels will triumph?
3. Paul offers some sage, succinct advice to the Romans that is certainly applicable to us in our daily lives. We are to be "wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil (v. 19)." We are to practice the good and acceptable will of God and have no trafficking with all that is contrary. How would you say that you are putting this positive/negative into practice in your life, the life of your family? What are some practical ways you have done this? One of the greatest threats in our homes is the intrusion of electronics allowing families to be together but in separate worlds with no personal interaction? How have you found ways to take what is of great advantage in many ways, but limit its destructive potential?