

Paul's Concluding Words

(Romans 16:1-27)

Story: In 1972, the Miami Dolphins embarked on an unforgettable and unparalleled perfect winning season. Coach Don Shuala led his team to a 14-0 regular season, then a 3-0 run through the play-offs culminating with a Super Bowl victory. No other team has matched that perfect record.

Every year 30-some odd teams try for a perfect winning record, but for 4 decades, the Miami Dolphin's record stands alone. The New England Patriots came close to breaking the Dolphins record in 2007 when they went 18-0 only to loose to the New York Giants in Super Bowl 42.

The opposing coach going into the '72 Super Bowl was asked to comment on the Dolphin's stellar defense. "I can't recall any of their names," he said, "but they are a matter of great concern to us." Can anybody guess the nickname of the 1972 Dolphins Defense? The "No-Name Defense."

What made that 1972 team so special was not the handful of superstars—it was the dedication of every member on the team. The willingness of every player to execute his position with excellence for a common purpose. Something special happens when everybody plays their position. The whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. They had some great players, no doubt. But plenty of other teams throughout history have had great personnel. More Pro-Bowl players, superstars, and Hall of Famers. Yet no team has ever reached the level of achievement that the 1972 Miami Dolphins did.

Intro: In this concluding 16th chapter of Romans the Apostle Paul names 36 people. Eight of these people were ministering with Paul in Corinth, and the rest were in Rome. He identified 27 men and seven women by name. Each of these individuals were faithful members of Christ's ministry team. He sends his personal greeting to 24 people in Rome. In addition, he refers to two households in verse 10-11, that of Aristobulus and that of Narcissus. He also refers to some unnamed brethren in verse 14. And finally there are two unnamed women, the "mother" of Rufus (v. 13) and the "sister" of Nereus (v. 15). Most of the names are Gentile, reflecting the mainly Gentile population of the church in Rome.

Warren Wiersbe suggest that this extensive list of names of so many friends in a

city Paul had never visited shows that “Paul was a friend-maker as well as a soul-winner.” Each of these individuals had either ministered with or helped Paul in the course of his extensive ministry.

The chapter is arranged in five separate segments. First, Paul commends Phoebe, the bearer of this letter to the church at Rome (vv. 1-2). This is followed by a long list of personal greeting to friends living in Rome (vv. 3-16). Third, in verses 17-20 Paul issues a warning to watch out for false teachers. Fourth, Paul sends along greetings from 8 faithful companions who were serving with him in Corinth (vv. 21-24). Fifth, He concludes with a beautiful benediction of praise to God (vv. 25-27), the longest benediction Paul ever penned.

I. A Personal Commendation Of Phoebe (vv. 1-2)

v. 1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; **2** that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

Phoebe was the woman who carried this Epistle from Corinth to Rome. Paul commends her as a “sister in the Lord,” and as “a servant” of the church in her hometown of Cenchrea, which served as the seaport for Corinth. Scholars are not sure if Phoebe held an official office as a deaconess, or was simply a faithful servant of the church at Cenchrea. Most commentators believe Paul stressed her service, not her office.

In any event, Paul commends Phoebe to the saints in the church at Rome, and asks them to receive her warmly in the Lord, and to help her in whatever matter she might have need of. He lets them know that she routinely helps others in need, and had been a great help to him as well.

Look next with me at Paul’s personal greeting to numerous friends in Rome

II. Personal Greetings To Friends In Rome (vv. 3-16)

In this list of 24 people Paul includes singles, married couples, widows, and widowers. He greets men and women, slaves and social elites, new Christians and mature believers, Greeks, Romans, and Jews. He has met some in prisons, and many in synagogues, several in marketplaces, and a few in churches. This list depicts God’s diverse heart for His church. It depicts a taste of heaven!

Greet Priscilla and Aquila (vv. 3-5a)

vv. 3-5a—Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, **4** who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; **5** also greet the church that is in their house.

Paul's first greeting goes to his long-time friends and ministry partners Priscilla and her husband Aquila. Paul had first met this couple in Corinth (Acts 18:2). They shared the same trade as tent-makers, and spent considerable time working and ministering together with Paul. We are not sure how or when they risked their own lives for Paul, but he was grateful for them and their faithful service to the Gentile churches. They had served with Paul in Ephesus (Acts 18:19), instructed Apollos (Acts 18:24-28), and had apparently returned home to Rome where they had lived previously (Acts 18:2). Paul also sent along his greeting to the believers who met in the church in their home. The first century churches met, for the most part in believer's homes.

v. 5b—Greet my beloved friend, Epaenetus, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

v. 6—Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

Mary, along with all of the other women mentioned in this passage, are said to "have worked hard" for the Lord. In secular Greek the verb "to work hard" means "to work to the point of exhaustion." Mounce notes that "it is interesting that the mention of *exhausting work* is restricted to women" (Romans, 275).

v. 7—Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Andronicus and Junias, were Jewish kinsmen, perhaps of the tribe of Benjamin just like Paul. They apparently spent time in prison with Paul, and had come to faith in Christ before Paul did. They had proven to be outstanding messengers for Christ. Paul is using "apostle" here in its general sense of traveling missionaries, and not as a technical reference to one of the 13 apostles.

vv. 8-10a—Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and

Greet Stachys my beloved.

Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ.

No other details of these 4 beloved saints are known. But it is clear that Paul loved them, and respected them as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The last named saint, Apelles had been tried and found to be trustworthy. This is what it means to be approved in Christ. Mounce suggests that “Few qualities are as important in the believer as faithfulness in carrying out the responsibilities assigned” (*Romans*, 276).

v. 10b—Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.

It should be noted here, that Paul did not greet Aristobulus himself, which may indicate that this man was an unbeliever. He sent his greeting to the believers, probably slaves, who served in Aristobulus’ household.

v. 11a—Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Herodian is another Jewish kinsman.

v. 11b—Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

It is commonly accepted that *the household of Narcissus* is a reference to the famous freedman *Tiberius Claudius Narcissus*, who served and was freed by emperor Tiberius. He is said to have been a man of proverbial wealth, who wielded great influence during the reign of emperor Claudius.

Next to receive Paul’s greeting were Tryphaena and Tryphosa, v. 12

v. 12a—Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord.

It is believed that Tryphena whose name means “dainty” and Tryphosa whose name means “delicate” may have been twin sisters. Like Mary, mentioned above, these dainty and delicate sisters worked hard for the Lord Jesus.

v. 12b—Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

Persis likewise worked hard for the glory of the Lord.

v. 13—Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

It is conjectured by many that Rufus was the son of Simon from Cyrene, who was forced to carry Christ’s cross to Calvary. He is believed to have emigrated to Rome, and had been chosen to serve in the church there. At some unknown time, the mother of Rufus had been like a mother to Paul in her service to him.

Paul concludes his personal greetings by mentioning nine other individuals, along with the brethren and saints with them in verses 14-15.

vv. 14-15—Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. **15** Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

The “brethren [or saints] with them” (vv. 14, 15) may refer to other Christians who met with these named individuals in a local house church.

Paul closed his personal greetings with the instruction in verse 16

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

This ancient practice of greeting fellow believers with a holy kiss was a regular part of the worship service in the early church (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12). This is a reference to the regular form of greeting, the holy kiss of peace. Philips transliterates this to read, “Have a hearty handshake all around.”

Paul moves from greetings and commendation to issue a stern warning against false teachers, vv. 17-20

III. A Warning To Avoid False Teachers (vv. 17-20)

Rom. 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. **18** For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Paul urged his friends in the church at Rome to keep an eye out for those who might come in among them and cause dissensions and hindrances. False teachers were a danger to the church from its earliest days. They caused divisions among the brethren, and created obstacles that caused others to stumble. These false teachers rejected the deity of Christ, and introduced teachings that were contrary to the apostolic teaching upon which the church was grounded. Paul was confident that the believers in Rome could handle any threat, v. 19

19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is

evil. Paul rejoiced over the reputation the believers in Rome had earned. They had embraced the apostles' teaching, and were living obedient lives. Nonetheless, Paul admonished them all to exercise wisdom in following the truth about Christ, and the Gospel he taught, and to remain innocent, to reject what is evil. Paul assures his readers that God will soon crush Satan, v. 20

20 And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Paul was not saying that Christ would soon return, and crush Satan. He was simply saying that their rejection of the false teachers, who might come into their midst, would serve to frustrate and destroy Satan's work among them.

Paul's concluding benediction, calling for God's grace to be manifest among the believers in Rome, usually closes out his letter. However, while Paul may have intended to end here with this benediction, his companions who were ministering alongside him in Corinth, asked him to send along their greetings to the saints in Rome, vv. 21-23

IV. Personal Greeting's From Paul's Companions (vv. 21-23)

vv. 21-23—Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. **22** I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. **23** Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.

This list of faithful Christians reminds me of the roll call of faithful saints listed in Hebrews chapter 11. Timothy is mentioned often by Paul. He was Paul's "son in the faith," meaning he was saved through Paul's ministry. Lucius may be a reference to Dr. Luke, Paul's traveling companion and writer of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

Jason may have been Paul's host in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:5-9). Sosipater was probably Sopater of Berea who accompanied Paul when he left Greece toward the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). Tertius was the secretary who wrote this letter as Paul dictated it to him. Gaius was the host, in whose home Paul was residing at Corinth. Paul recounts Gaius' conversion and baptism in 1 Corinthians 1:14 when he first founded the church in Corinth. An assembly of believers met in Gaius' home as well. Erastus held the high office of city Treasurer in Corinth. Nothing more is know about Quartus.

24 [The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]

While many of the earliest Greek manuscripts do not contain these words, many are confident that it was written by Paul's own hand, to place his official seal on the letter, as was his custom (2 Thess. 3:17-18).

V. Paul's Concluding Benediction Of Praise (vv. 25-27)

This concluding benediction of praise is the longest one Paul ever wrote.

vv. 25-27 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 which has been kept secret for long ages past, **26** but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; **27** to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

The apostle Paul was confident that God would establish his readers according to the gospel which he preached, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. Paul's preaching revealed the mystery of God concerning the church. *A mystery you recall is a "Sacred Secret"—a spiritual truth never before revealed.* It cannot be known apart from God revealing it to men. The sum of the mystery mentioned here concerns the formation of the church of Jesus Christ comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:3, 6). Paul explains in Colossians 1:26-29 that "this mystery had been hidden from the past generations, but has now been manifested to His saints through Paul."

God has provided salvation for men of all nations, realized through the obedience of those who by faith believe in and receive Christ as Savior.

Paul closes out this marvelous Epistle to the Romans in v. 27 with an adoring look upward in an attitude of worship and wonder —To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

God is worthy of all glory because of who He is and what He has done for us. Our access to Him is through faith in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Closing Story:

The name *Stradivarius* is synonymous with fine violins. This is true because Antonius Stradivarius insisted that no instrument constructed in his shop be sold until it was as near perfection as human care and skill could make it. Stradivarius observed, “God needs violins to send His music into the world, and if any violins are defective God’s music will be spoiled.” His work philosophy was summed up in one sentence: “Other men will make other violins, but no man shall make a better one.”

God needs faithful violins to play His music of love and forgiveness to a lost and dying world. Do you want your name recorded alongside these faithful saints in Corinth and Rome? As members of Horizon Church, You and I have the opportunity to become a ministry team like the Miami Dolphin team of 1972. With every person serving according to our gifts, sharing with the lost in our community, and giving as God directs, we can change our community for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Are you up to the challenge?

Closing Prayer:

Closing song: *Write Your Story*