

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide

Romans 16:1-16

History, Culture, & Context

In this section of Romans, Paul is concluding his letter to the Romans and launches into various greetings to those that have served the church (27 names in total!). Aside from his long list of greetings, Paul also warns against false teachers and closes the chapter with a doxology (vv. 25-27).



In vv. 1-2, we read, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchrea, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.” Phoebe (which means “bright” or “radiant”) and is called a “deacon of the church”, which some translate as also “servant” or “helper” given her role as Paul’s emissary to deliver his letter. Some scholars also suggest that Phoebe held the position of “deaconess” in the early church. Cenchrea, the seaport town where she lived, was approximately six miles to the east of Corinth.

In verses. 3-5, Priscilla and Aquila are a married couple, who had been expelled, along with the other Jews, from Rome (see Acts 18:2-3). Verse 5 says, “Greet also the church in their house”, because poorer or newer synagogues and churches often met in homes before they could afford a building of their own. Verse 5 concludes with a greeting to Epaenetus, who is thought to be the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

The remaining verses speak of other various friends and helpers of the church: In v. 6, Mary is identified simply as someone “...who has worked very hard among you.”

Verse 7 speaks of Andronicus and Junia, who were thought to be married, and were “highly repected among the apostles” by Paul, and also imprisoned with him at one time.

Verses 8-9 speak of greeting Ampliatus, Urbanus and Stachys. These were common Roman names.

Verses. 10-16 speaks of greeting several others, namely: Apelles, who was “approved in Christ” and to “greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus”, Herodion, the family of Narcissus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologus, Julia, Nereus, Olympas, “and all the saints who are with them.” Verse 16 concludes with, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.”

Questions to Consider

1. Who is Phoebe? What is her position and importance to Paul’s mission and the church?
2. Like the names listed in these verses, how are you working hard for Christ and the church?