



## Group Discussion Guide

### Romans 16

*For groups meeting July 26 evening through August 2 morning.*

We have reached our final week in Romans. As we come to the end of this letter, we see that Paul included a long list of personal greetings (vs. 1-15). This is the type of reading that we often struggle with; trying to wade through the names and references and understand the reason these are recorded and included as God's inspired Word. But there is much more to a section like this than a simple list of names. In fact, Paul wrote some specifics about certain individuals that are important for us to see and even use as an example for our own lives.

In verse 2, Paul wrote about Phoebe, a woman who is referred to as a "servant of the church at Cenchreae." While the English Standard Version and others use the translation "servant," although the Greek word used in Paul's letter is *diakonos* which elsewhere is also translated as "deacon." The New Living Translation and New International Version use the translation, "deacon." Some Bible scholars believe Phoebe, whose name means "bright" or "radiant," was in fact a deacon in the sense of fulfilling the official office outlined by Paul in 1 Timothy 3. This is supported by the use of the phrase "of the church" as a modifier of *diakonos*. It is believed that Paul commended her to the believers at Rome because she was entrusted with carrying the letter to them. Phoebe served the church located at Cenchreae, which is referenced in Acts 18. Paul stated that Phoebe had been a helper to him and many others, and he asked the believers in Rome to welcome her and help her.

Paul wrote less about the others he greeted, but nonetheless we can discern some important points from some who are referenced.

- Prisca (Priscilla) and her husband Aquila risked their own lives for Paul. They were a blessing to him and to the churches of the Gentiles. This couple likely led a house church that met in their own home.
- Epaphroditus was the first person in Asia to believe in Jesus.
- Mary worked hard to serve the church at Rome.
- Andronicus and Junia both had suffered for their faith. The apostles knew about these two men, who had come to faith before Paul did.

Others are listed as "beloved" and the mother of Rufus is referred to as being a mother figure to Paul also. Paul encouraged the believers in Rome to greet each other with a holy kiss, which was a customary greeting of the time, much like our handshakes and hugs are today. (Remember those? Won't it be great when we can shake hands and hug again?)

Paul then shared some final instructions. He taught the believers in Rome to avoid people who “cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught,” (v. 17). The apostle was direct in his comments about such people. He wrote that they only serve their own desires rather than serving Jesus, and they used deceitful tactics to lead people astray (v. 18). He acknowledged the obedience of the Roman church and how blessed he was by their faithfulness, but also expressed his desire to ensure they knew what to embrace and what to avoid (v. 19). Paul encouraged them that God already had secured the victory over Satan and “will soon crush Satan under your feet,” (v. 20). he then offered greetings from his co-laborers, including Tertius who wrote the letter as Paul dictated it (vs. 21-23). It should be noted that verse 24 appears in some translations but not all, for the simple reason that it is not found in all ancient manuscripts. It reads, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*”

Paul’s final paragraph of the letter was meant as a praise to God, and also as a reminder to the believers in Rome that God is able to “strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ,” (v. 25). This, Paul wrote, was a mystery that had been kept secret for many years but now was made known to the world so that people would place their faith in Jesus (v. 26). The letter was completed with a flourish of praise to God, who is the only God, the source of wisdom, and who is worthy to receive glory forever through Jesus Christ (v. 27).

## Discussion Questions

1. If Phoebe was indeed a female deacon in the church at Cenchreae, and was entrusted to carry the letter to the Roman church, how would that affect your understanding of gender roles within the church?
2. What can we learn from those whom Paul lists in his greetings? How can we follow their example?
3. Why do you think Paul issues a warning to stay away from people who cause divisions and hinder right teaching about God's ways? How can we identify people who only serve their own desires?
4. How does it encourage you to know that Paul was confident God would crush Satan under the feet of the believers in Rome? What do you think he means by this?
5. Paul's final paragraph reinforces the importance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the foundation of all we believe and practice. How do we grow in our ability to view all things through the lens of the Gospel? How do you think doing so will change how you respond to the world around you?
6. Share something God has shown you through our time together walking through Romans. How has He used this to help you grow?