

Romans 16 (2017)

- Paul's greatest written work – and perhaps the most important New Testament epistle – comes to an end in a peculiar fashion
 - Paul spent 8 chapters walking us down the Romans Road, carefully explaining the way to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
 - Then Paul spent 3 chapters revealing the mystery of God's plan for His people Israel
 - Finally Paul taught nearly four more chapters on how the church should walk in the light of our salvation
 - He's covered so much ground, and he's tackled many of the toughest topics of our faith
 - So what kind of ending do you tack on to the end of such an impressive letter?
 - Surprisingly, Paul ends with a fundraising appeal
 - And perhaps that makes sense in this case
 - Because the enormity of what Paul has given to the church in this letter certainly justifies an expectation of gratitude
- We ended last week in Chapter 15 v.13 as Paul wrapped up the formal teaching in this letter
 - And now Paul turns to addressing his readers specifically, calling on them to respond to his letter in the appropriate way

Rom. 15:14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

Rom. 15:15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God,

Rom. 15:16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

- We can clearly see Paul turning to address his audience as he says "and concerning you..."

- What follows is a diplomatic yet convicting appeal for the church in Rome to support Paul's future missionary journeys
- To understand how and why Paul makes this appeal, we need to remember the background I provided at the outset of this letter
- As you may remember, by the time of this letter Paul was the foremost apostle of the church
 - He had traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire evangelizing and teaching
 - He had established or disciplined churches in major Roman cities like Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus
 - And he had written letters to many other churches around Asia Minor, and each letter was treated as a precious object by the faithful
 - And then there was the church in Rome
 - Rome was the most important city in the known world
 - And therefore the church in Rome carried itself with a certain degree of pride
 - What's more, the church had not been founded by an apostle, which gave the leadership an even greater sense of accomplishment
 - Yet the great apostle Paul had never visited the church in Rome, even when he had been in the neighborhood (relatively speaking)
 - In fact, Paul had not even written to the church in this great city
 - So by the time Paul sat down to write his letter to Rome, the church leadership was feeling a bit overlooked and unappreciated
 - And yet Paul was going to need the help of this significant and well-financed church body for his future evangelism
 - Which is why Paul went to such effort to impress them with his letter
 - No doubt Paul has blown them away with an intellectual feast of spiritual truth that uplifted them and humbled them

- He gave them something they could truly appreciate, something that honored them
- Paul had saved his best for them
- And interestingly, Paul has also organized his letter so that he ended his teaching addressing the equality of Gentiles in the church
 - That organization was strategic on Paul's part, since it leads him directly into his appeal for support
 - Paul is the apostle sent to the Gentiles
 - And as such, he focused his evangelism efforts on traveling to major centers of Gentiles
 - One such area would be particularly hard to reach...Spain
 - It lay at the outskirts of the empire, on the opposite side from Judea
 - So for Paul to travel that far, he would need significant time and support
 - And not coincidentally, Rome lay directly in his path from Judea to Spain
 - Therefore Paul wrote Romans to educate and impress his audience in Rome, which then gave him opportunity to make a heartfelt appeal
 - That appeal will be for the Jewish leadership in the Roman church to give generously to Paul's mission to reach Gentiles
 - That's a tough sell under any circumstances, but even more so when the church isn't on your side
 - So returning to Chapter 15, we see Paul's smart strategy unfolding
- Paul's argument comes in three parts
 - First in vs.14-21 Paul reminds the church of the nobility of his mission to reach Gentiles and his faithfulness in carrying it out
 - Secondly, in vs.22-29 Paul presents the Roman church with his appeal for their partnership with him in his next mission

- Finally in vs.30-33 Paul explains his future missionary plans and the opportunity the Romans have to be involved in that work
- This is a very traditional missionary fundraising approach, or at least it has become traditional
- In vs.14-16 Paul begins in defense of his mission, but starts diplomatically mentioning the good things he's heard of this church
 - Paul says he knew this church
 - He knew they were full of goodness, filled with knowledge and able to admonish others in the truth
- This is a notable statement, since Paul had never visited Rome
 - But that doesn't mean Paul didn't have connections in that city and in that church
 - Take a moment to glance at Chapter 16 and you'll notice that Paul spends considerable time greeting acquaintances in that city
 - It's the longest such list in all his epistles
- He was making a point that he had connections to the Roman church despite having never visited the city
 - Paul begins saying he knows they are full of goodness, referring to their moral excellence or character
 - The Roman church stood as a light amidst darkness in the center of a pagan empire
 - They were a beacon of godliness, resisting the evil culture so they could transform it by the truth
 - Likewise, Paul knew they were full of knowledge referring to their understanding of biblical truth
 - This was largely a self-taught church, humanly speaking
 - No apostle had made it to Rome as far as we know, so they hadn't known the benefit of personal instruction by someone like Paul
 - Nevertheless, they were learning the Scriptures, understanding Christian doctrine even before the canon was complete

- And out of that learning, Paul says he knew they were admonishing believers to live out what they were learning
 - In other words, this wasn't a church content with filling heads with knowledge
 - They expected followers of Jesus to live in ways that pleased their Master
 - Truly this church was spiritually mature
- Then in v.15 Paul says nevertheless I wrote boldly to you, meaning he covered important doctrinal truth in great detail without the intent to offend
 - Paul knew that the church might take offense at receiving such a thorough explanation of the Gospel
 - It might seem to suggest to them that he thought the church in Rome didn't understand the basis of their own salvation
 - He says he writes boldly to them on "some points" as if to imply these were things they probably already knew
 - In reality, they probably learned a lot from Paul's explanation as do we all
 - Still Paul handled their egos gently, leading him into his main point in writing: to remind them that he has a God-given mission to reach Gentiles
 - In v.16 Paul explains he ministers as a priest for the purpose of pleasing God by converting Gentiles
 - Who in turn will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit
 - This is the heart of the mission of the church, not just to reach Gentiles but Jews too
- Furthermore, Paul wants the church in Rome to understand that his absence was ordained as part of that mission

Rom. 15:17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.

Rom. 15:18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,

[Rom. 15:19](#) in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

[Rom. 15:20](#) And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation;

[Rom. 15:21](#) but as it is written,

“They who had no news of Him shall see,
And they who have not heard shall understand.”

- Paul says that in his work he takes every opportunity to boast in things God is doing, yet he does not presume to boast about his own accomplishments
 - This is Paul's preface to explaining the great things that have happened in his ministry
 - He wants to be sure the church understands he is not assuming personal credit for these outcomes
 - Rather, he acknowledges that the Lord alone has accomplished this work
 - And yet the Lord has been working through Paul's ministry, and the results speak for themselves
 - Paul's years spent reaching Gentiles with the Gospel has resulted in a tremendous response of obedience to the Gospel, both in word and deed
 - Gentiles were turning to the God of Israel, embracing Jesus as that Messiah
 - They were confessing Christ, showing obedience to the Gospel by their word
 - And they were turning from pagan lifestyles and immorality to obey the commands of Christ
 - These were remarkable achievements that few in Israel could ever have imagined happening
 - As Paul says in Ephesians, it's literally the breaking down of the temple wall separating the Jew and Gentile
 - The Gentile response came by the power of the Spirit and in conjunction with great signs

- These experiences validated that the Lord was indeed courting Gentiles and welcoming them into the body
- As the Spirit manifested these wonders in the midst of Gentile acceptance, the apostles were forced to accept their confessions were genuine
- The Spirit worked in this way to overcome the natural resistance of Jewish evangelists
- Which is why Paul reminded his readers of these things
- So in light of the Lord's remarkable saving work among Gentiles, Paul says he determined to visit places where Christ had not yet been preached
 - That was in keeping with his office as apostle
 - The word apostle roughly translates "one sent with a message", and it reflects their mission to go into unreached areas
 - Apostles generally didn't build on top of another's work, though on occasion they did (see 1 Corinthians 3)
 - Instead they opened doors in new places
 - Paul says he had managed to open these doors from Jerusalem to as far as Illyricum, which was a Roman province
 - Illyricum is the ancient name for the present day Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic Sea
 - It covered an area from Greece in the south through current-day Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Croatia
 - That area was a short boat ride across the Adriatic to Rome
 - So Paul's saying he's been moving in Rome's direction, but his mission kept him focused on other areas first
 - After all, why would Paul go so far out of his way to reach a well-established church in Rome when it meant passing by other unreached areas?
 - That's his argument in vs.20-21
 - He says he set his mind on skipping over places where another work already existed and a church was formed and growing

- Now we know Paul stopped in other cities where churches already existed, places like Ephesus for example
 - But these cities were located on the way for Paul, so he would have had to go out of his way to avoid them
 - That wouldn't have made sense, so Paul stopped to encourage and teach those churches
 - Paul was fulfilling the word of Isaiah by bringing good news to those who had no knowledge of God
 - And he was telling of Jesus to those who had not previously heard of Israel's God much less about a coming Messiah
- Yet up to now, Rome hadn't been on the way to anywhere Paul needed to minister to
 - Which is why Paul hadn't visited them

Rom. 15:22 For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you;

Rom. 15:23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you

Rom. 15:24 whenever I go to Spain – for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while –

- Notice Paul says in v.22 “For this reason...”
 - His mission kept him away, and he hoped the church could appreciate his reasoning
 - But all that was about to change
- Paul now intended to come their way soon, and therefore he wanted to smooth things over with the church prior to his arrival with this letter
 - In v.23 he says that he had no further place to go in these regions between Jerusalem and Rome
 - And since Paul had long desired to visit the church in Rome, now was the appropriate time
- Paul's claim to have exhausted his opportunities to reach unreached areas in Asia Minor is quite a remarkable testimony

- Obviously, Paul wasn't the only person evangelizing at that time, so he's not taking credit for moving the Gospel to every place
- Still, we know Paul was the most prolific evangelist, by far
- So here's something to consider
 - Paul is sitting in Corinth preparing to return to Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third missionary journey
 - He was converted to the faith barely 20 years earlier
 - And in just two decades of life as a Christian, Paul had evangelized roughly half the known world
 - He had written nearly half of the books of the New Testament canon
 - And he had founded churches in at least 14 major cities and towns...in 20 years
 - How much have we accomplished for the kingdom over the past 2 decades as believers?
 - Obviously, that question is unfair because we only accomplish what the Lord determines to do through us
 - Still, there is something to consider here, because undoubtedly we could have done more for the kingdom had we set our mind to it
 - Paul's remarkable legacy doesn't establish our goal in ministry, but it does challenge us to increase our effort and focus
 - We know all Paul accomplished for the Lord, but we don't know all he sacrificed
 - We know of some sacrifices, including coming near death and suffering great deprivation at times
 - In the end, church tradition holds that Paul was martyred for his work
 - So let his example serve to challenge our willingness to sacrifice so that we might be useful to the Lord for accomplishing great things also
- Now look at v.24 where we see Paul mentioning a desire to be in Spain

- Paul saw Spain as the next great frontier for his apostolic ministry
 - And as it turned out, Rome was on his way
 - So the time had come to stop and visit the Roman church
 - But Spain was a long way from Rome, and if Paul was going to make it that far, he would need support
 - And that's exactly why he's written to Rome
- Paul says he hopes to see them in passing through to Spain, and in seeing them be helped in reaching the Gentiles in Spain
 - This is a simple and bold appeal
 - It's honest and unashamed
 - I can think of no better way to raise money for ministry
 - No need to pander, no need to plead
- But Paul isn't coming to Rome right away
 - Even though Paul was sitting in Corinth as he wrote, and was only a few days journey away from Rome, he was taking a detour

Rom. 15:25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.

Rom. 15:26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

Rom. 15:27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

Rom. 15:28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

Rom. 15:29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

- Paul continues to explain his future missionary plans saying he must first return to Jerusalem
 - He's literally traveling in the opposite direction from Rome
 - But take note of why he's headed back

- He's delivering a contribution from Gentile churches in this region to meet the needs of the Jewish church in Jerusalem
- The church in Jerusalem was especially poor largely because faith in Jesus made a Jew a pariah in the city
- Without the support of the Jewish community, it was nearly impossible to survive in the city
- So support from other churches in the region was a huge issue, and Paul worked hard to raise support for the Jewish church wherever he went
 - Having persuaded a number of churches to give generously to the needs of Jerusalem, Paul is now ready to return to the city
 - And he mentioned this trip to those in Rome because he wants to make a larger point to them
- Notice in v.27 Paul says these Gentile churches were only too happy to give to the Jewish church out of gratitude for what they had received
 - Paul's alluding to the importance of Israel and the Jewish people in God's plan to bring salvation to all mankind
 - As he taught earlier in this letter, Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord is the root that we've been grafted into by faith
 - So the Gentile church is indebted to the Jewish people for spiritual things
 - So how can we object to offering them material things, which are of far less value
- Can you see the wisdom of Paul's appeal here?
 - He's about to appeal to a church run by Jewish leaders asking them to fund his mission work to reach Gentiles in Spain
 - But before he does, he mentions his upcoming trip where he will deliver generous Gentile support to a needy Jewish church
 - So as the Jews are being blessed by Gentile believers, so it should be that these Jewish believers might bless future Gentiles in Spain
 - Notice Paul then says in vs.28-29 that as he comes back this way and stops in Rome, he will expect to be sent on to Spain by the Roman church

- To be sent on means to be supported in that journey
- Notice he adds that when he comes he will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ
- Paul is referring to the blessing Christ would bestow upon the church in Rome on the occasion of Paul's visit and by way of his teaching and leadership
 - Paul was not an immodest man, as his letters demonstrate
 - So when Paul says this, he isn't complimenting himself
 - He's simply acknowledging the work the Lord was prepared to do through him in keeping with his role as an apostle
- So the deal he's offering the church in Rome is simple
 - He intends to come to that church so that he might bless them in their mission
 - And so that they might bless him in his mission
 - It's all about the mission
 - Paul isn't interested in becoming wealthy and he's not interested in visiting Rome merely for the attention it will give him
 - For Paul, everything is about the mission of the Church
- And therefore Paul turns to making a specific request for support...for prayer support

[Rom. 15:30](#) Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

[Rom. 15:31](#) that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;

[Rom. 15:32](#) so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.

[Rom. 15:33](#) Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

- The financial support Paul needed could only come once he arrived in the city of Rome
 - But the prayer support could start immediately and would be even more powerful

- Paul didn't urge the church to support him financially, but he urges them to pray
- He refers to their prayers on behalf of his ministry work as striving together with Paul
- It's a great way to understand your opportunity to pray for others in their ministry
- First, it's a joining with another person
 - God will accomplish more through two members of the body united in this way than by individuals working apart
 - Even though one is using hands and feet while the other is using prayer, they are still joined spiritually
 - And in eternity we will understand how the Lord used these together to accomplish more to His glory
- Secondly, both are striving Paul says
 - Obviously, Paul's long and dangerous journeys were a form of striving for Paul
 - But the Romans' prayers for Paul were equally striving
 - In fact the Greek word for strive is actually a compound word made up of the Greek words "together" and "fighting"
 - So it conveys the idea of fighting together
- If you have ever tried to pray for someone else's ministry work on a continual basis, then you know full well that it is striving
 - You are fighting with the other person against a common enemy
 - The enemy will resist their work in the field in one way
 - And he will resist your work on your knees in other ways
 - But both of you will be striving if you're working at all
- So as you consider your opportunities to support ministry, remember there are two types of support we should offer the work of the church
 - One is material, the other is spiritual
 - One is easy, one requires striving

- One occurs in a moment, the other is continuous
- One has delayed effect, the other has immediate effect
- One enables the work, the other enables success
- Interestingly, Paul did return to Rome directly after visiting Jerusalem, though he entered Rome in chains
 - Jews conspired to have Paul arrested by Roman authorities while in Jerusalem
 - As a Roman citizen, he appealed to be tried by Caesar (which was a Roman right)
 - Which then led Rome to transport Paul for free to Rome
 - Paul spent two years in house arrest awaiting trial
 - And according to reliable early church records, Paul eventually left Rome with their support and indeed went to Spain for a time
 - Later, after several years, Paul returned to Rome
 - This time he was executed by Nero, according to church tradition
 - With that Paul's legacy was complete
 - He had preached from Jerusalem to Spain
 - Countless men and women will be in the kingdom either directly or indirectly due to Paul and his writings
 - So in a sense, those in Rome who funded and prayed for Paul's work were striving with Paul for all those gains as well
- At this point, the letter is essentially complete...but for greetings in Chapter 16
 - We will read the chapter – and I will do my best not to butcher the names – and then we will consider a few historical facts along the way

Rom. 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

Rom. 16:2 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.

Rom. 16:3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

[Rom. 16:4](#) who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;

[Rom. 16:5](#) also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

[Rom. 16:6](#) Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

[Rom. 16:7](#) Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

[Rom. 16:8](#) Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

[Rom. 16:9](#) Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

[Rom. 16:10](#) Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.

[Rom. 16:11](#) Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

[Rom. 16:12](#) Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

[Rom. 16:13](#) Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

[Rom. 16:14](#) Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.

[Rom. 16:15](#) Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

[Rom. 16:16](#) Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

- Chapter 16 is a very personal list of thoughts and greetings
 - He mentions 36 names, 8 who are with Paul in Corinth and the rest are those he greets in Rome
 - Altogether, he mentions 27 men & 8 women
 - He also mentioned two households and three house churches
 - Most of the names are Gentile, reflecting the growing population of Gentiles in that church
 - It is interesting that Paul could name so many people in Rome and yet had never visited the city
 - As I mentioned earlier, Paul lists so many names because not having visited, he wanted to affirm his connection to this church

- Also, Paul has probably made some personal contacts with those who left Rome to come visit him
- So in fellowship, he greets them to be polite and loving
- As Wiersbe observed, Paul was a friend-maker as well as a soul winner
- The first name Paul mentions, Phoebe, is the one who carried this letter to Rome from Corinth from where Paul wrote it
 - She might have been a deaconess
 - The word in Greek is *diakonos*, which means servant or minister or deacon
 - Illustrating that from the beginning women have played an important and even prominent role in the church
 - The list from v.3–v.16 includes many Latin or Greek names (or possibly they are Jews with Greek names like Paul)
 - Priscilla and Aquila met Paul in Corinth when they fled Rome after the Emperor Claudius ordered Jews to leave Rome
 - They were also tent makers and as Paul says, they risked their lives for him
 - Paul took them to Ephesus with him where they helped Apollos
 - Later they moved back to Rome and had a church in their home
 - We also read about them being back in Ephesus with Timothy at one point
- The first convert from Asia refers to Ephesus, (Asia Minor) not modern day Asia
 - The reference in v.7 to apostles who were in Christ before Paul is striking
 - Notice these men are called apostles yet they are not among the twelve nor mentioned anywhere else in scripture
 - This is further evidence that there were numerous apostles not given high profile in scripture
 - Looking at verse 10, Paul greets not Aristobulus but the man's household

- Paul is probably referring to the slaves of that household who had become believers, yet Aristobulus himself had not
- Rufus may have been the son of Simon of Cyrene who helped carry Christ's cross
- And apparently his mother was like a mother to Paul at some point
- And in v.14, the brethren is probably a reference to another house church

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.

Rom. 16:18 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.

Rom. 16:19 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.

Rom. 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

- Interestingly, Paul interrupts his greetings to issue a brief warning against the activity of false teachers in the church
 - In v.17 Paul asks the church to keep a watchful eye for these guys
 - They will know them because they cause dissensions
 - They create hinderances to obedience to the word
 - This is an example of fruit from trees, to use Jesus' metaphor from Matthew 12
 - You may not immediately know if a teaching is correct, but if it's a lie from the enemy, his fingerprints will be all over it
 - It's effect will be negative on holiness, obedience and unity
 - People will not be edified by its introduction, they will be harmed
 - People will move away from sound doctrine as a result, which is why the enemy sows bad teaching in the church in the first place

- Paul asks the church to take note of this pattern allowing it to inform their understanding of those who spread such teaching
 - Men who have this impact on the church are slaves of sin, not of Christ
 - Meaning they are not believers
 - So we're not talking about mistaken believers teaching falsely
 - We're talking about unbelievers intentionally manipulating the body for their own purposes
- They use smooth speech, which means they are well-spoken
 - And they ingratiate themselves with flattery which is a subtle form of lying
 - In other words, their style covers for their lack of substance
 - They offer the church candy-coated poison for the soul
 - And in that way they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting
- Paul and other New Testament writers offer a great deal more information about dealing with false teachers in other letters (especially Jude)
 - So for now, Paul simply issues this warning in passing
 - I suspect he does this because at this time in history Paul was especially troubled by false teachers hounding him as he traveled
 - The mid-century saw a particularly strong rise in false teaching around Judaism and the Law as well as other heresies
 - So Paul may have become concerned that his interest in going to Rome might lead false teachers to get there before him
 - Also in v.19 Paul seems to think that the report of Rome's good teaching and steady adherence to true doctrine could provoke the enemy to respond
 - But in v.20 Paul says the enemy is destined to be crushed under Christ's feet
 - So though today Satan sows confusion in the church with false teaching, it will not change the end result for him

- Nevertheless, Paul calls upon the Roman church to be wise in what is good and innocent of evil
 - This is a powerful statement about avoiding the enemy's schemes
 - First be wise in what is good, what is true, what is in the Bible
 - Have a firm understanding of proper things so you will be in a position to identify the lies of the enemy
 - In this, the enemy will find it much harder to deceive you
 - Secondly, we must remain innocent of evil
 - If we voluntarily engage in sin, we open ourselves to condemnation and self-destruction
 - And the enemy can exploit our misdeeds to compromise our witness or distract us from our service
 - But if we remain informed of the truth and committed to walking in obedience and in love, the enemy has a much tougher job
 - At that point he can only tempt us to fall
 - And if we don't take the temptation, we are outside his reach
 - Easier said than done, but that's the formula
- Finally, Paul's great letter ends with a final salutation

Rom. 16:21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

Rom. 16:22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

Rom. 16:23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.

Rom. 16:24 [The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]

Rom. 16:25 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,

Rom. 16:26 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;

Rom. 16:27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

- The letter ends with a list of names of those working with Paul in Corinth
 - Timothy was working in Ephesus but spent time with Paul in Corinth
 - Lucius is probably Luke, who wrote the Gospel and Acts
 - Jason was likely Paul's host in Thessalonica
 - Sosipater traveled with Paul on his third journey
 - Tertius penned the words of this epistle as Paul spoke them (how would you like to have that accomplishment on your resume?)
 - And I wonder what that man was thinking as he heard the words of this letter pour out of Paul?
 - It's also interesting to remember the various problems happening in the Corinthian church at that time
 - Yet Paul's stay in that city was used by God to pen the Book of Romans
 - Certainly turning all things to good...
 - Erastus was the city treasurer of Ephesus
 - His name was found in 1929 on a marble pavement laid in the city of Corinth
 - The pavement read:

Erastus, in return for his appointment as commissioner for public works, laid this pavement at his own expense

- This was a lower office than city treasurer, so apparently he moved up after beginning his career in public office
- Paul ends with a powerful doxology
 - It combines thoughts and phrases from earlier letters and from Romans itself
 - Paul trusted that God was able to establish the Roman church according to the gospel that Paul delivered, as preached by Jesus Christ

- In other words, Paul trusted that the Lord would make true and meaningful the complicated things Paul wrote
- He didn't worry about providing a commentary to accompany the letter...he knew God would explain it
- Paul goes on in v.25 to explain that the message he has delivered was a mystery beforehand
 - A mystery in scripture is a truth God kept hidden through past ages, later to be revealed during the Church age
 - Paul revealed several mysteries in his letters, including one in this letter regarding Israel's salvation
 - So it's a high privilege for this church to be the first to learn of this truth
- In v.26 Paul says they were manifested or made plain to them and all the nations
 - That statement makes clear that Paul recognized that what he was writing was Scripture intended to be shared with all nations
 - He knew the importance of what he shared with the church in Rome and of its eternal lasting quality
- Finally, Paul says these truths were revealed to everyone so they would lead to an obedience of faith
 - That's the way to end a letter like this...focused on the obedience required
 - We've learned many things, we've been challenged even by these truths
 - We've expanded our appreciation for God's grace given to us in Jesus Christ
- Now the question is what will we do differently as a result? What steps of obedience are now within our reach because of what we have heard?
 - To our wise God and Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, be all the glory, Amen