

Romans 16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 February 2022

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] It's on page 950.

If you want a church Bible, they're just at the door there. We've reached the end of Romans! I've struggled through them.

I've never felt that with Romans. I've always felt I just wish I could go back to the start again. There's just so much here, isn't there? If this series on Romans has been a quarter of the blessing to you that it's been to me, well, you'll have been blessed.

So Romans 16. It would be a great job if it wasn't for the people. That's what ministers say at ministers' conferences. It's kind of a minister's joke.

You're not meant to take that seriously because Romans 16 gives the lie to all of that. You might be surprised when you think of the Apostle Paul, but the Apostle Paul was a people's person.

[1 : 12] And church ministry is all about people. And if you don't believe that, just look at Romans 16. We've come to the end of Romans 16, and you might be tempted to think, oh, this is a bit of an anticlimax.

We've seen breathtaking, astonishing truths. And you come to the end of Romans, and it reads like a list of names, doesn't it, in an old telephone directory.

And if you're looking for baby names, well, it's probably a good place to look. If you want unusual baby names, it's definitely a good place to look. I counted 33 names in this chapter. If I counted properly, there are boy names, there are girl names, there are Hebrew names, there are Greek names, there are Latin names, and they're all jumbled up together.

But it's much more than just a list of names. It would be easy to dismiss this final chapter of Romans as like a PS, you know? The kind of thing you put on the bottom of your email.

Pass on my regards to Auntie Vera. Say hello to Uncle Stan or something like that. But that would be a huge mistake. You would miss the point completely if you thought of it like that. Emil Brunner, the theologian, calls this chapter one of the most instructive chapters in the New Testament.

[2 : 28] And it's so instructive because it's so easy to think of church in terms of organization and programs and activities and buildings and structures and clergy.

And failed to see that at the heart of a church like ours and a church like there was in Rome are relationships. Relationships between people like you and I.

And Romans 16 is a glorious reminder of that this morning. Whenever you come to a chapter like this, you're desperately looking for something that will tie the whole chapter together.

And in this list of names, there's a word that's buried in this chapter. Not only does it tie all the names together, but it actually wraps up the book of Romans in a pretty remarkable way.

It's a word that you'll all know in English. It's the word in verse 25 of Romans 16. The word strengthen.

[3 : 36] It's literally from the Greek, the word steroids. Steroids. Why do athletes take steroids? We know that they're not supposed to.

But why do they do it? Why do people take steroids? It's to give them strength and stamina. It's to build muscles. It's to build themselves up.

Make themselves strong. And that is why Paul has written Romans. Steroids. Chapter 1 and verse 11. He says this. For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. Steroids. Paul has written Romans to make you strong. It's the same word you find at the end of the book. In verse 25. He commands them. It's still the word.

Steroids. He commands them to God who is able to strengthen them according to my gospel. So if you did a drugs test on the Roman Christians. If you were to give them a blood test.

[4 : 41] What would you find running through their veins? It would not be steroids. It would be the gospel. The gospel is pumping through their veins. And that is why Paul wrote Romans.

He wants you and I and them to be strong in the gospel. So that they would be a base from which the gospel would go out into all the world. So verse 26. That all the nations might come to the obedience of faith.

And so Romans is written to strengthen you and I. For God's mission to the world. And here in this last chapter.

You get a glimpse of what it looks like on the road. In Rome. So you know what it's like with some of you. You're walking along Ealing Broadway. And you come to Marks and Spencers. You know the big windows along Marks and Spencers.

Kind of big huge windows that you're walking along. And as you walk by. You vain people. You look in the window and you think. Oh I look great today. Or you think my hair isn't straight.

[5 : 42] Or my you know my tie isn't straight. Or something like that. You catch a sight of yourself. There's a window display. But you're not looking in the window display. You're looking at yourself aren't you? And so this morning.

What Romans 16 for us. Is it functions on a window in the church in Rome. You get to see into the church of Rome. But actually as we look into the church of Rome.

We get a glimpse of ourselves. And we look through the window. But we get a reflection back. And so the Apostle Paul. I think you can summarize this chapter in three words.

And the points get. The first one is long. The second one is a bit less. The third one is really brief.

Okay. And so the first point is this. Greetings. That's really obvious isn't it?

As you read the chapter. There's greetings. But then in the middle of the chapter. Verse 17. There's a jarring note. There's warnings. There's a severe warning. And then it ends with the way you hope Romans ends.

[6 : 40] It ends with blessing. It ends with a benediction. So three things. Greetings, blessings. Warnings, blessings. Let's look at the greetings. It's not one bunch of Christians in Corinth.

Ascending their high to another bunch of Christians in Rome. It is that. In some ways. There's a church in Corinth. Or churches in Corinth.

And there are churches in Rome. And he's sending greetings to the church. But you look at verse 16. There's far more to it than that, isn't there? He says this. All the churches in Christ send their greetings.

This is not just Corinth to Rome. All the churches in Christ send greetings. That is what Christians do. It's how churches relate to each other in the New Testament.

So churches in the New Testament, they are not independent from one another. They are interdependent on one another.

[7 : 42] The churches in the New Testament, their lives are intertwined with one another. And so that's what you see here, don't you? You see real people living in real time in the real world in whom the gospel is at work.

And they're remarkably diverse, aren't they? Just look at them. Think of the people in Corinth who are with Paul at the end of the chapter. Look at verse 23. Look at Tertius.

He's a cheeky little fellow, isn't he? Tertius in verse 22. He kind of gets a selfie with the Apostle Paul in verse 23. He puts himself into the picture.

And he says, I'm the one who's been writing this down. I'm Paul's secretary. I, Tertius, wrote this letter. He's getting his name in there. And then in verse 23, there's a guy, can you see him, called Cortus.

Any Latin scholars here? Tertius, Cortus. They're not names, are they?

[8 : 43] Are they? They're not names. They're numbers. Number three and number four. Third and fourth. They're slave names. Here in Corinth is number three slave and number four slave.

And guess who's in the same verse? Look at Erastus, verse 23. He's the director of public works in the city of Corinth. That's a pretty high-flying job. He's made it. Do you see what the gospel does in Rome or Corinth or in Ealing?

Do you see what the gospel does? It supernaturally brings people together. People who wouldn't be seen dead together normally.

Gospel transcends race. It transcends social barriers. It spans the generation gap. It crosses racial divides and gender differences. So just look at this church in Rome in the first 16 verses.

What have you got there? You've got men and women. You've got the married and the single. You've got the slave and the free. You've got the old and the young. You've got the rich and the poor. You've got town and country. Look at verse 9.

[9 : 47] There's Urbanus. There he is with his skateboard. He's a baseball cap turned backwards. He's kind of a 1990s city dweller.

But then there's Stachist. Do you know what his name means? What Stachist means? It means ear of corn. Ear of corn. He's got a thick accent.

It comes from Somerset. They're together in one church. Urbanus in his designer clothes talking into his iPod with his iPads on.

iPods or whatever it is. And there's Stachist. Stachist has got a bit of grass behind his ear. In the same church sitting on the same row.

There's people in this list of names with connections to the royal family. People who went to school with the Duchess of Cambridge.

[10 : 49] So something like that. The rich and the poor. The slave and the free. The Jew and the Gentile. Town and country. All united in Christ Jesus.

See Paul hasn't been to Rome yet. But he knows an awful lot of people there, doesn't he? And he knows all these people. And he knows where to find them. There's a phrase that keeps coming up. And it keeps occurring in the 16 verses. It comes up 10 times. I don't know whether he picked it up. He talks about all these people. And he says, all these people, I know where to find them. They are in the Lord.

And that's where they are. And so if you are in the Lord, you will be in church. Can you pick that up? If you are in Christ, you will be in church.

You cannot be a Christian. You cannot be strong and growing and useful unless you are actively involved in the local church. What will that look like? Let me just give you three things about these people of Rome.

[11 : 48] Look through the window with me. And I think there are three observations about the church which are really helpful to us. The first of all, they are hard workers. Secondly, they are risk takers.

And then thirdly, they are holy kissers. So just look with me at verses 1 and 2. And there she is, dear little Phoebe. Verses 1 and 2.

She is the one who has been entrusted with this letter. She is from Corinth. She has come to Rome with this letter and she has delivered it.

And Paul commands her to the Roman Christians as a servant of the church in Centrae. Corinth is a big city. Corinth, you will know it.

It was notoriously immoral. But this little place, Centrae, however you pronounce it, it was known as Sin City. Corinthianize.

[12 : 45] To Corinthianize was in the vocabulary. It means to be grossly immoral. And so in this big city of Corinth, Centrae was the red light district of Sin City.

It was the Soho. You can imagine what it was like. It was where all the bars and all the brothels were. And guess what? There's a church in Centrae.

C.T. Stead was a very peculiar man in lots of ways, but he's a hero of mine. He said this. Some like to sit within sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

There's a church in the red light district of Corinth. And Phoebe was a deacon. Phoebe was a servant in that church. So you can imagine, can't you, the mercy needs in that part of the city.

You can imagine she would have lost sleep serving in a district like that. How many family meals would have been interrupted? How much strain of pressure would be on her?

[13 : 49] All the complicated issues of people in an area like that. And Phoebe was a servant of the church. And then there's Priscilla and Aquila. And everywhere they're mentioned in the Bible, I don't know if you know this, everywhere they're mentioned in the New Testament, there's a church meeting in their house.

In Corinth, in Ephesus, and now in Rome, there's serial church planters. And guess what? There's a church meeting in their house here. And that is hard work. Paul refers to them, doesn't he? He says, my fellow workers.

And so can you see this? That church life, ministry, is hard work.

It's hard work. Some of you will know that. He mentions Mary in verse 6. Look what it says.

It says, who worked very hard for you. Abanus, verse 9, our co-worker in Christ. Then in verse 12, you meet the twin sisters, Tryphena and Tryphosa, who worked like Trojans.

[14:51] That's my paraphrase. Paul says, they worked very hard. Do you know what their names mean? Tryphena or Tryphosa. Their names mean delicate or dainty.

Paul says, don't believe it. They're hard workers. Perseus, another woman in verse 12, she's worked very hard in the Lord. What a great apataph.

Another way of translating that, if you've got a different version, it would say she did what she could. She did what she could. Isn't that a brilliant epitaph? So these people in Romans 16, they did what they could with their gifts.

They did what they could for the gospel. They are hard workers. And these are just the ones that Paul knows. And so they're workers, not spectators. Somebody has said, haven't they, that church is like a football game.

22 men in desperate need of a rest, being watched by 76,000 desperately in need of exercise.

Church can be like that, can't it?

[16:01] 80% of the work done by 20% of the people. That's what churches are like. Churches have a small core of people often who are working themselves to death, and the larger groups sit and watch and complain.

It's not how it's meant to be. Look through the window into the Church of Rome. It's all hands on deck. They're hard workers. It's repeated through the list, isn't it? They're working hard for the gospel.

And maybe you sit here and you think, actually, I've not been doing that. I want to do that. Come and speak to me afterwards. Come and speak to one of the elders. We'd love to help you in that.

And secondly, they're risk-takers, certainly to a Priscilla and Aquila.

Look what it says in verse 4. They risk their necks for me. Here's another interesting couple, Adronicus and Junior. We're not really sure who they are. We don't know much about the people in this list.

They're probably a husband and wife, but we're not sure about that. They could be two fellas. But they are probably a husband and wife. And notice what Paul says about them there in verse 7. He says, They're well known to the apostles.

[17:27] Paul not only calls them his fellow relatives, but they've been in prison with me. They've been servants. Look what he says in verse 10 about Apalos, who is approved in Christ.

He's not simply a pew sitter. His faith has been tested. It's been tried. And he's stuck out his neck. He's approved. He's taken risks. He's taken risks. And so if we want to reach new people with the gospel in this city, which we do, look through the window into this church in Rome.

And it will mean all hands on deck. And so that's my charge to you, IPC Ealing. If you want to reach this city with its teeming millions with the gospel, we don't even have to be as ambitious as that.

If we want to reach Ealing, Hanwell, Perryvale, Greenford, wherever you are, it's going to be hard work. And all hands on deck.

No passengers. So my observation is that growing churches, churches which are growing, are almost always behind budget.

[18:46] Growing churches are almost always strapped for cash. And that is because growing churches want to take risks for the gospel.

They are always trying to do the next thing and the next thing and the next thing. Growing churches are stretching and straining to the regions beyond.

And so we're going to need to be hard workers and risk takers. And of course, then we need to be holy kisses. Don't we? Look at verse 16. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

Do you know the difference between a holy kiss and an unholy kiss? It's about 10 seconds. J.B. Phillips, he kind of gave a funny translation of the New Testament.

And he was a bit embarrassed by verse 16. And so he paraphrased it in this way. He was an Englishman. He says, greet one another with a warm handshake. I think that's fair enough, actually.

[19:57] No one likes a limp handshake, do they? Some boys from the rugby club here. One of the things I've noticed about going into the rugby club is the more they like you, the more they insult you.

And so they greet one another with insults. The greater the insult, the warmer the welcome. It's a bit off-putting, if you don't realize it. But the more we insult them, the more we welcome them.

Now, whatever way is culturally appropriate to you, what it is saying is this, we are to be warm and affectionate towards one another.

We are to greet one another. The whole atmosphere is to be one of warmth, isn't it? So Romans 16, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet. It's more than a member's list, more than a rota.

Look at verse 13. I love verse 13. Don't you love what he says about Rufus' mum? You know she is. Who's Rufus' mum? Rufus' mum is the widow of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross for Jesus.

[21 : 06] And Rufus was their son. And Rufus' mum is now in Rome, and Paul says, look after her. He says, greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mum. She's been like a mother to me.

Maybe Paul's family had disowned him. It seems probably likely. He was brought up, the apostle, as a kind of Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was one of the Sanhedrin, and after he was converted, it would have been a great scandal on the family.

Probably his family deserted him. It's likely that Paul was married. It's very unlikely that he was unmarried. His wife, though, is nowhere to be seen. Perhaps she divorced him for the gospel.

And so he says, greet Rufus and his mum. She's been like a mother to me. This might sound sexist. It's not meant to be, but she cooked a meal for me. She did my washing. She helped me out on the practical things. Is that the kind of simple ministry that you could do?

[22 : 07] To be a mother in Israel, maybe to the young mums who are just struggling with their little ones. Could you be a mother in Israel? Could you be a grandmother to overseas students who've left their family and friends in another place?

Do you remember what Jesus says? Jesus said, no one who's left home or brothers or sister or mother or fathers or children for me and for the gospel, Jesus says, no one who's done that will fail to receive a hundred times as much.

in this life, homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, along with persecution and in the age to come. So where are the mothers and the brothers and the grandmothers and the sisters and the homes that are open to them?

Families that will welcome them. You see, you look into the window in the church of Rome and you see, this is what church looks like. There's a lot we don't know about these people but we do know they've got guts and they've risked everything for the gospel and they've got backbone because they're working hard to get the gospel out and they've got heart.

They're warm and they're affectionate to each other. How did they get to be like this as a church family? How did they get to be like this? Well, you do the drugs test and you do a blood test and you see that pumping through their veins is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 33] And the gospel isn't just the way you become a Christian, the gospel is the way that you live as a Christian and the gospel is what motivates you as a Christian and the gospel is what makes you strong as a Christian and the gospel is what binds you together as Christians.

And so Paul writes the letter to Romans that we've gone through to establish a church in the gospel. Now in the midst of these warnings, in the midst of these greetings comes a jarring note.

Look at verse 17. He issues a warning. I urge you, he says, brothers. I appeal to you, watch out. Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles to the doctrine that you've been taught.

Avoid them. Keep away from them. He's warning them of stranger danger. I can put it like that. We have to warn our kids, don't we? Keep away from strangers.

Watch out for predators. When you go online, don't talk to people online because these people, they prowl around. Steer clear of them at all costs.

[24 : 35] And Paul's message to Romans church is what, in Romans 16, what is the message? Greet, greet, greet, greet, greet. And then he says, don't greet. Avoid at all costs. Shun.

Keep away from these people. There are certain people who are not to be welcomed, certain people you are not to give a holy kiss to. There are people whom you are not to have any affection for. There are people who are persona non grata.

Why? Well, because of exactly that. They are persona non grata. They are non-grace people. They come with another gospel, not the gospel that Paul has preached. Not the gospel of grace alone, faith alone, and Christ alone, but they come with another gospel contrary to the teaching you've learned, he says.

literally parallel to the teaching that I've given you. So if somebody comes and denies the gospel, you'll spot it a mile off. Somebody comes and says, well, Jesus isn't Lord, you'd see it really clearly.

But what happens is, Paul is saying, they bring something in alongside the gospel. So they say, well, yes, we believe in grace alone, we believe in faith alone, we believe in Christ alone, but have you spoken in tongues?

[25 : 43] Because you're not a real Christian unless you've spoken in tongues. Or were you baptized by full immersion? Because you can't possibly be a real Christian until you've gone fully under.

Or what's your view of church government? And so we go on and it becomes Christ plus, doesn't it? And Paul says, watch out for that.

We don't always see that coming. These people, they are wolves in sheep's clothing. And Paul says, they can appear like angels of light, keep away from them and watch out for them.

And look what he says about them. He describes them. He says, they are full of smooth talk and flattery. They deceive the minds of naive people. And he says, I don't want you to be naive.

I want you to be wise about what is good and naive about what is evil. Be naive about evil.

[26 : 47] I was talking with a few of you this week, isn't it? And I think we're often dazzled by the world. And we don't want to appear unsophisticated, particularly for younger Christians.

So we don't want to appear naive and unsophisticated. So we want to go to the places our friends go. And we want to watch what our friends are watching. And we want to read the books that our friends are reading.

And Paul says, don't. You don't have to put your head in a dustbin, do you, to know what's in it. You can smell it.

One look at the dustbin's lid, you don't have to go in. One look at the cover of some books, you read the back page and you know what they're about.

And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14, in understanding the truth of the gospel, be men, be adult. Grow in your understanding of the gospel, but be innocent about what is evil.

[27 : 46] Watch out for those who put it the other way. Watch out for those to say, well listen, if you're going to really reach London, you've got to get right into the culture. You've got to go to these places, you've got to read their books, you've got to know about the kind of box sets on Netflix, you've got to watch the films.

We don't. Be naive about those things, but be adult when it comes to the gospel. Stranger danger. Notice what he says in verse 20, he says attack is the best form of defense. It's an amazing verse, it's really profound. Verse 20 of Romans 16. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Why bring the devil into it? Well, because he's behind it, isn't he? He is the father of lies, he's the master of deceit, and every deviation from the truth can be traced back to him.

He's a murderer from the beginning, but do you see what Paul says? He won't get away with it.

There's a battle going on for the souls of men and women and boys and girls in our society, in our culture here in London.

[28 : 56] There's a battle for the redemption and the renewal of the world, and you and I, us Christians in London, we're up against it. We don't fight against flesh and blood, it's the powers of darkness.

But Paul says to you and I, the outcome is absolutely certain. There are, aren't there, pretty difficult times coming for churches in London.

you know, I'm not a prophet, but we need to understand as we think about that, the outcome is certain. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

There's a song called, These Boots Are Made for Walking, and that's what they're going to do. And one of these days, these boots are going to walk all over you.

I think that's Romans 16, verse 20. And so Paul reminds these Christians, doesn't he, that Satan is defeated, and he's telling you, put on the gospel boots.

[30 : 03] He quotes from Genesis 3, verse 15, it's the proto-evangelion. It's the first time that the good news of the gospel is preached in the world.

Do you know who the gospel is preached to for the very first time? It's preached to the devil. And the gospel was not good news for Satan. It was bad news, the worst possible news for Satan. Do you remember what God said?

The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. The seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent.

And that's the promise that out of the human race would come a deliverer, one who will turn the tables on evil, one who will reverse the curse, and one who will crush Satan's head. And will undo the effects of the fall.

He will bruise your heel, yes, but you will crush his head. And we know, don't we, that that promise was so wonderfully fulfilled by the Lord Jesus at the cross that he dealt the death blow to Satan.

[31 : 04] and so Satan thinks on that good Friday, I've won, I've dealt the victory, I've finished with Jesus. He thought it was all over but the shouting.

He thought he got rid of Jesus, but with the bruised heel of his crucified humanity, what did Jesus do? He stamped all over Satan's head and he destroyed the works of the devil.

And so he says to the church in Rome, he says, don't be intimidated by Satan or his henchmen. By the preaching of the gospel, Satan is cast out, his empire is pushed back, his captives are free.

So put on your gospel boots and resist the devil and say to him, these boots are made for walking and that is what they're going to do. And one of these days, these boots are going to walk all over you, Satan.

Soon. Jesus said, this gospel of the kingdom, it must be preached to all nations and then the end will come. So get on your boots and get out there.

[32 : 13] The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. What a word that is. He can't win. It looks very much like he's winning, doesn't it? But he's on a hiding to nothing.

Because Jesus already defeated him and that leads me to the third thing which will be really quick. Greetings, warnings and finally blessings. See the end of verses 25, 27. It reaches a climax. It's like a great symphony.

All the major themes woven together, there's a crescendo. Theology becomes doxology. He bursts out in praise.

Paul grabs the pen from Tertius and he probably writes these words in his own hand and he says, now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept hidden for secret for ages but has now been declared, disclosed through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

Amen. What a note to end on. It's the right note to end on, isn't it? Do you know Johann Sebastian Bach? He's the composer.

[33 : 32] In history, he's a genius. He wrote brilliant pieces of music with a kind of ease unparalleled even by Mozart. He was the rock star of his day. His music was popular.

It was contemporary then. What many people didn't realize is that most of his music was written for the church. He was a Protestant Christian. He was a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the original manuscripts, many of his original manuscripts, you'll find one set of initials at the top of the page.

I think it's JJ which means Jesus helped me. That's how he set about his work. As he composed his work, he said, Jesus help me.

And at the bottom of the page, when the page was completed, do you know what he put? The initials SDG, Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory. That's the way to begin and end the Christian life, isn't it?

It's the way to begin and end every day of your life. So when you wake up in the morning and you wipe the sleep out of your eyes, Jesus help me.

[34 : 46] And I don't know what this week is going to hold for me, but Jesus help me. And I can't do this on my own, but Jesus help me. And before you get into the bed at night, you say, to God be the glory.

It's a great way to do church together, isn't it? To rely on the grace of God and to seek to bring glory to God and not to ourselves.

And how is God glorified? Well, he's glorified when all the nations believe and obey him. And how is that going to happen? It's going to happen through the proclamation of the gospel. So IPC, with Jesus help, and to the glory of God, put on your gospel boots and get out there.

because there's work to be done. Let's pray.